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# CALCUTTA IN URBAN HISTORY

PRADIP SINHA



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CALCUTTA

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## A Note on Method and Chronology

The subject of this work was suggested by Professor N. K. Sinha in 1965. He was then trying to organise a team of young researchers who were expected to work on new topics of Indian history. What we learnt at Calcutta University at that time was the value of hard work on archival material. That was the basic method. The most desirable thing was to get hold of a heavy chunk of archival material and then to follow a flexible strategy of collecting other material. Field work, exploration of myths and even of hearsay reports might be part of the strategy.

Social history is really a nebulous concept unlike political or economic history. The primary task of a researcher is to make a vague thing as concrete as possible, though ambiguities are bound to remain. Some interesting areas of social history would remain unexplored if we adhere to a rigid chronology. Events in the orthodox sense do not necessarily determine the course of social history. In this study the chronological focus is on the period from the mid-18th to the mid-19th century. Almost the entire archival evidence and the greater part of other material relate to this period. But since the approach is at least partly one of reasoning and exploration of trends, some references occur to earlier and later periods.

A bibliography has not been appended because it might have been misleading. Except for the archival sources the materials are extremely scattered. Only footnotes can give an idea of what has been used in particular cases.



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## Abbreviations

MCSCR	—Mayor's Court and Supreme Court Records
CPC	—Calendar of Persian Correspondence
HCOS	—High Court, Original Side
O.W.	—Old Wills

# Introduction

A major purpose of this work is to place Calcutta in the framework of India's urban history without ignoring the unique elements in the city's history. It may appear that Calcutta is not the best choice for generalisations on India's urban history. After all, it grew basically as a colonial city, following a global tendency of growth of urban centres for the convenience of an economic and political power based thousands of miles away. Any study which ignores this basic reality is likely to defeat its purpose. But almost equally stultifying may be an inordinate emphasis on this global reality at the cost of some basic realities of India's economic and social life and background.

The question of continuities and discontinuities arises for Calcutta, as it does for such cities as Bombay and Madras. Each of these cities had a black town from the earliest stages of its growth. Was it not, to an extent, a continuation of traditional urbanism, meaning thereby the complex attributes of pre-colonial port cities, riverine emporia and the regional urban centres? Could we not detect a segment of Surat, of Delhi's Chandni Chowk, and of a traditional town in Bengal like so many period pieces in the spatial arrangement of, say, late 18th or early 19th century Calcutta? Could we not still wonder, looking at the traditionally most organised Muslim sector in Calcutta, whether it was a silhouette of a Mughal town? Such a thought indeed occurred to people who were better placed than we are on the time scale. In the 1860s a Bengali traveller, who wrote some good things among a number of bad ones, observed in the course of his peregrinations in Delhi that the real Chandni Chowk was not in mid-19th century Delhi but on Chitpur Road in Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> In 1872 Calcutta's pioneer sociologist, the Rev. James Long observed while addressing the Family Literary

• <sup>1</sup> Bholanath Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, London, 1869, vol. 2,

Club in Burrabazar: "The position of your Society in Burra Bazar has often reminded me, in threading into its labyrinth, of the adage: 'One half of the world does not know how the other lives.' The Burra Bazar and the Mughal part of Calcutta are quite a *terra incognita* to the other part, and I hope your society will pursue its inquiries into the curious social life of the Marwaris, Jews and Mughals that inhabit the far-famed Burra Bazar."<sup>2</sup>

What were Burrabazar and the Mughal part of Calcutta as historical realities? Significantly, it was a Persian-speaking Khatri (north-Indian merchant group) who in 1869 addressed the Family Literary Club, composed predominantly of people of Bengali gold merchants' caste, traditionally residing close to the Muslim-dominated sector, on the history of Burrabazar.<sup>3</sup> Little fragments of evidence from the late 18th and early 19th century source materials relating to Calcutta help to put the jigsaw puzzle together. But it seems a little historical reasoning is necessary before the factual evidence, not particularly rich and chronologically somewhat whimsical, is brought into the picture.

## II

Islam, or rather peoples professing Islam, and allied peoples from west or central Asia tended to act as a major urbanising force in India for centuries after the serious weakening of the Hindu-Buddhist-Jain urban tradition. The penetration of India started with early Arab traders, followed by a major breakthrough by central Asian peoples who were not necessarily traders. The process of opening up went on at a

p. 278. The Chandni Chowk on Dharamtala Street in Calcutta is a misnomer.

<sup>2</sup> N. N. Laha, *Subarnabanik Katha O Kirti* (Bengali), vol. 3, 1942; excerpts from the Fifteenth Anniversary Proceedings of the Family Literary Club, pp. 27, 29.

<sup>3</sup> N. N. Laha, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

quickenning pace.<sup>4</sup> India was not permitted to close in on itself, though the tendency was at a certain point irresistible for a deeply agrarian civilisation to consolidate itself on the basis of village kinship and rural commodity production. Within India itself a number of merchant communities, such as the Gujaratis, and some others on a less spectacular scale, possessed a network of trade and finance which far transcended the mechanism of a deep-seated agrarian economy, though they might never have bypassed the social pull of the overall situation in terms especially of kinship. Politically, the force of kinship and clan tradition worked with great intensity during the period when Islam was penetrating into the country, influencing the process of urbanisation or growth of new types of agglomerations on a reduced scale compared to the preceding one.<sup>5</sup> Such agglomerations did not have the capacity to accommodate or reinforce the impulse to long-distance trade and to the formation of large-scale agglomerations in terms of politico-military and commercial centres at some crucial points in the vast space of the sub-continent. The Islamic and allied peoples from west and central Asia played a major role in providing a structural accommodation not only to the commercial impulse but also to politico-military organisation.

### III

Taking the Mughal part of Calcutta of the late 18th and the early 19th century as the point of departure, we find stray references to the Mughals as a community in Calcutta, suggesting a well-knit group of central Asians of Iranian and Turkish origin led by some prominent community leaders.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, 1956, pp. 340-43, 356-57.

<sup>5</sup> K N Singh, "The Territorial Basis of Mediaeval Town and Village in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, India", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 58, 1968. Also see R. G. Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule*, Berkeley, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter II and Appendix VIII—"The Mughal Community in Calcutta".

This essentially Persian-speaking Muslim ethnic group had provided politico-military, cultural and even mercantile leadership at a broad organisational level for some centuries, and this leadership was reflected in some crucial features of urban development such as the cosmopolitan bazars, caravanserais, *kataras* and the fort-palace complex. It is not fortuitous that a late 18th century European artist observer made a distinction between the Muhammadan and the Hindu bazar,<sup>7</sup> meaning by the latter the local bazar (the intention was certainly not to draw a sharp contrast at a religious level). For a very recent period in history an interesting description of the Muhammadan bazar occurs in connection with the economic life of Bombay city.<sup>8</sup> The implication of the term Muhammadan seems to be not very far removed from cosmopolitanism. The Rev. James Long lumped together Burrabazar with the Mughal-Jewish (cosmopolitan) part of Calcutta. Repeatedly in the 19th century and even at this moment the term Burrabazar has been used to mean the organised macro-Indian type of business sector. It is not fortuitous again that Burrabazar proper as a functionally identifiable zone was very close to the really cosmopolitan (Mughal, Armenian, Jewish, Greek, Portuguese, Gujarati) zone in Calcutta.<sup>9</sup>

For at least a few centuries before Calcutta started on its career as a large-scale urban agglomeration the major force behind the larger urban formations in India came from Islamic and allied peoples from west and central Asia. At what chronological point the Hindu-Buddhist urban tradition weakened to make way for the Islamic urban thrust may be debatable but not the fact of the thrust.

The centres of Muslim political authority till about 1500 were more like military camps than developing urban centres. The west and central Asian mercantile forces had, however, been active in opening up western and northern India to that phase of mercantile expansion which may be

<sup>7</sup> B. Solvyns, *Les Hindous*, 1811, Tome 3, Eleventh Number, Bazar Hindou, Pl. 1.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix I—"Muhammadan Bazar in Bombay".

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter II of this book.

said to have started with the beginnings of Islam.<sup>10</sup> New contacts were being made and the ancient caravan routes revived. A considerable degree of control over trade and finance was very likely to have been maintained by traditional macro-Indian business communities, Jain-Baisnab in sectarian background and regionally concentrated in western India.<sup>11</sup> The medieval west-central Asian bazar had been taking shape in the Indian context during the period.

A further expansion of the bazar occurred with the expansion of Mughal peace in the 16th and 17th century. The control of the traditional Indian business communities continued. But the oriental bazar derived its structural synthesis from the complex groupings of Arabs, Persians, Jews, Armenians and others acting as middlemen in the trade between India and west-central Asia. They were the travelling merchants—the pedlars. Commercial contacts with Europe during the Mughal period led to further sophistication of the bazar economy, dominated internally by the *banias* of traditional business communities.

The bazar tended to remain an autonomous world with tenuous links with political, administrative and cultural organisations in urban centres. A lack of institutional growth in terms of at least politico-legal institutions is a characteristic of the bazar. A multiplicity of floating marginal operators below the layer of a few monopolists controlling the flow of commodities is another characteristic. The establishment cost had to be kept down to a level which permitted closing and shifting an operation with maximum profit gained. The life style was governed by rural or community traditions as modified by the exigencies of temporary residence in the bazars. The attitude was that of a sojourner, prepared to go to the ancestral village, often handing over business to sons and nephews. This did not, however, altogether discount the possibility of erecting stone houses or permanent structures.

<sup>10</sup> Subhi Y. Labib, "Capitalism in Islam", in the *Journal of Economic History*, March, 1969.

<sup>11</sup> Tome Pires and Francisca Rodrigues, *The Suma Oriental*, vol. 1, London, 1944, pp. 41-46.

In the context of the developed bazar economy of the 16th to 18th century it is possible to speak of a rough quadrilateral of trade—the two coasts and the two axes which connected the extremities of the coasts with the heartland of imperial cities like Delhi and Agra. This heartland was further connected with central Asian trade *via* Lahore and Kabul.<sup>12</sup> Major Indian cities crowded round these routes and the hinterland of each felt the pull of the market to some extent. But this pull naturally disappeared after a point, as the cost of land transport became prohibitive. Thus interior India with its innumerable villages remained distinct from these other areas of trade and administration.<sup>13</sup> As regards monetisation at the rural level, this was almost entirely the result of the need to transfer surplus agricultural produce to the town, there being practically no evidence of a flourishing rural market for urban crafts.<sup>14</sup> At the urban level the production was basically for urban consumption and for a wide overseas and overland market.

#### IV

It is in this setting that a sophisticated bazar economy had developed in India. Elsewhere in the world the pre-industrial situation could not have been the same à la Sjöberg.<sup>15</sup> Papers in a significant work on middle eastern cities perhaps indicate a much higher degree of urban population in the Middle East than in India and also a greater institutional complexity.<sup>16</sup> In east Asia Japan, during the Tokugawa period, probably saw the submergence of politico-military castle towns in a virtually closed economy based on peasant agricultural production. The lack of an extensive foreign

<sup>12</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, "Trade and Politics in 18th Century India", in D. S. Richards (ed.), *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, Oxford, 1971, p. 183.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Irfan Habib, "The Economy of Mughal India" in the *Journal of Economic History*, March, 1969, p. 69. Possibly Das Gupta's and Irfan Habib's observations need some qualifications. But the qualifications would perhaps be matters of relatively minor detail.

<sup>15</sup> G. Sjöberg, *The Pre-Industrial City*, Glencoe, III, 1960.

<sup>16</sup> I. M. Lapidus (ed.), *Middle Eastern Cities*, Berkeley, 1966.

trade capable of concentrating commercial activities in a favoured deep water port probably contributed to more diffuse city growth in Japan than in India.<sup>17</sup> The overwhelming predominance of one political and commercial centre in a west European nation indicated an impulse—political and economic—that could not have occurred in India with its great cities of Delhi, Agra and Surat. India's exposure to overseas commerce occurred in a political and institutional set-up that must have been very different from that of Japan, in which what was virtually a rice economy produced a dynamic urban impulse, and from that of western Europe where the institutional innovations of the Mediterranean urban world—especially the Italian city states—came to be adapted to national needs.<sup>18</sup>

The relative isolation of the economy from political, social and cultural changes might be a characteristic of Indian history. The persistence of this isolation and the continuity of the traditional pattern of economic activity are graphically represented in the words the Europeans sometimes used in the 18th and early 19th century in describing the Indian part of the British Indian port cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras—namely that in another part of the town live the black merchants and other natives.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> T. Wilkinson, *The Japanese City*, Takao Yazaki, *The Japanese City—A Sociological Analysis*, 1963.

<sup>18</sup> John Hicks, *A Theory of Economic History*, 1969, pp. 38-39, 77-80.

<sup>19</sup> For a description of Madras see Milburn, *Oriental Commerce* (1813), vol. 2, p. 1.

"Madras is divided into two parts, the Fort or White Town, and the Black Town. . . . The Black town is to the northward of the Fort, separated by a spacious esplanade. . . . The town is the residence of the Gentoo, Moorish, Armenian and Portuguese merchants. . . . Some of the merchants at Black Town [own] large and elegant buildings. . . ."

For a description of Bombay see *Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island*, vol. I, p. 11, quoting from *Asiatic Journal*, May-August, 1838.

"Many of the rich natives here have habitations in the Bazar, residing in large mansions built after the Asiatic manner but so huddled together. . . . The Black Town . . . spreads its innumerable habitations amidst a wood of coconut trees—a curious, busy bustling but dirty quarter swarming with men and inferior animals and presenting every variety of character that the whole of Asia can produce. . . ."

For a description of the Black Town in Calcutta see Chapter I of this book.



For the whole of the 18th century in Calcutta the mercantile part of the Indian town or the great bazar had an overwhelming dominance in the "native" sector. The black or the native town is a feature of the colonial era but it also represents a continuation of traditional urbanism. It is a continuity in a different historical context. The arrival of traditional mercantile communities from the northern and western part of India continued steadily, imparting to the great bazar in Calcutta many of the features associated with the traditional cosmopolitan bazar.

The colonial setting created, to begin with, a new firm-oriented economic organisation which retained economic initiative in the port cities, leaving the traditional bazar a large degree of autonomy.<sup>20</sup> The autonomy was essentially in the sphere of manipulation of internal trade and credit. The bazar could still thrive but the logic of its tradition kept it aloof from industrial orientation. The pattern of pre-industrial economy in most Asian countries asserted itself with a new force leading to the growth of primate cities, the rural hinterland being very little exposed to the forces of urbanisation.

Given this historical context and the continuity of a certain traditional urban organisation in present-day Calcutta and other cities of south Asia, certain contemporary issues acquire some degree of clarity. The situation of crisis in Calcutta is surely a product of some of these historical factors, and as yet no serious work on urbanisation has suggested that Calcutta's crisis is unique to the extent that at one point the path of historical development of Calcutta has diverged from the trends represented by the general urban history of India.

In this historical context—colonial, Asian, macro-Indian and regional—Calcutta does unfold a certain personality suitable for a serious historical study. The "city of dreadful

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix II—"The Port and the Mart in Calcutta". See also Appendix V—"Some Representative Bengali Neighbourhoods". The last item but one is "Durmahata", which may be described as a busy Bengali riverine mart.

night", the "classic urban desert", the colonial city *par excellence*, is still a city with a way of life—a city where people have not forgotten to smile, contrary to certain assumptions.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Chicago Daily News*, February 20, 1967. "It is not much of an exaggeration to say that only the children smile in Calcutta—and they only because they aren't old enough to know how miserable they are."



## CHAPTER I

# The City as a Physical Entity

“The Best Money that Ever was spent”, wrote the Agents of the Company in Bengal in 1698, eight years after the “foundation” of British Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> They were referring to the purchase of three villages, which were to constitute Calcutta, from their former proprietors (zamindars) for Rs. 1000, subsequently raised to Rs. 1500.

The Court of Directors wrote in 1710: “. . . What is laid out be done with good Husbandry not so much for our present benefit as for the sake of our successors . . .”<sup>2</sup>

“You are in the right to have no thatched or matted houses within the ffort [fort] . . . That whatever building you make of Brick it be done of Pucker [masonry] Work which though chargeable is cheapest on account of its duration.”<sup>3</sup>

The burden of the instructions from the Court of Directors in several letters was to make the settlement “fflourishing [flourishing], sweet and wholesome”, in early 18th century parlance.

Many years later, not long removed from our time, a lover of Calcutta—he did not specifically say “English Calcutta”—wrote of the “vague and tantalising charm” of the city.<sup>4</sup> “The cool green foliage with which her tanks are fringed refresh the eyes in the fiercest sun. There are few sights which can challenge comparison with the *maidan* [the green] when it is ablaze with the scarlet splendour of blossoming gol mohur trees. ‘In the gorgeous hues of her sunsets, Calcutta is wholly

<sup>1</sup> Extract from Chutanutte *Diary* and Consultation, October 3, 1698. Factory Records, Calcutta, no. 3 in C. R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1906, vol. 1, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> General Letter from the Court of Directors, January 9, 1710, Letter Book no. 13, in C. R. Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

• <sup>4</sup> H. E. A. Cotton, *Calcutta, Old and New*, Calcutta, 1907, p. 241.

beautiful, and never livelier than in the chill of some misty winter's evening, or at the close of a sullen monsoon day, when the crimson clouds are piled over Hastings [a European suburb of old Calcutta] like the reflection from some giant conflagration, and the silent river rushes along, black and unfathomable. . . . Another witching mood is hers when she lies sleeping in the white enchantment of the Indian moonlight, which turns her stucco to rubies, her plaster to pearls.' . . ."<sup>5</sup>

## II

The territory which Job Charnock selected for the site of the British settlement in 1690 was a pestilential region like so many other cities in their origin. It can be presumed to have been a relatively "empty" region, where settlement was in the form of straggling hamlets in the neighbourhood of or within jungles or marshes, while the older settled area, a ribbon of high caste settlement, stretched in a thin line along the old course of the river for four to five miles to the south of the core of the British settlement. This relatively empty space, however, stood on an ideal communication line. On the west the space had been right on a busy channel of international commerce since the 16th century.<sup>6</sup> Combining fragmentary evidence with some direct experience of this riparian deltaic complex, we can in a somewhat halting way talk about periodic markets of which the Sutanuti *hat*, the market for cotton and yarn, appearing prominently on Upjohn's late 18th century map of Calcutta, obviously as a traditional zone, might have been one of the beads on a string. But to the east of the main channel of commerce, almost clandestinely, existed a passage right up to the Sunderbans and the sea,<sup>7</sup> a passage near whose commence-

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 241-42. The excerpt from Cotton's book contains a quotation whose source is not indicated by Cotton.

<sup>6</sup> See Introductory Map.

<sup>7</sup> There is in Bolts' *Considerations on Indian Affairs*, p. 41, a map which

ment stood the Tree, passing almost into a legend and losing much of its reality because of its supposed hooka-smoking association with the founder of British Calcutta. The Tree, grandchild or great-grandchild of what might have been the original Tree, also appears prominently on Upjohn's map, almost indicating a point of convergence between land and river routes on the opposite side of the great commercial channel of the Hooghly. The narrower channel suited smaller boats.

Situated between these two channels and crisscrossed with watercourses, Calcutta, or what was to be Calcutta, was a narrow, thin slice of territory, ideal for seasonal business and barter transactions, or at some places suitable for amphibian autochthons, but hardly offering an environment for anything more than elementary community formations on the relatively high ground amidst swamps.<sup>8</sup>

shows the "Bellegot Passage through the Woods", indicating the navigable channel through the forest of Tarda, an extension of the Sunderban type of deltaic forest, according to early 19th century topographical reports. The forest commenced from about 16 miles from the city. "Bellegot" stands for an important nodal point linked with one of the main arteries of the city—the Bowbazar Street which is described in mid-18th century maps as "Avenue to the Eastward". Near the intersection of the land route and the waterway stood the fabulous "Bytakkhana Tree", located in Upjohn's map of Calcutta (1794).

In the Report of the General Committee of the Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvement (1837-40), vol. 5, p. 151, a part of the peripheral region is thus described: "Not more than forty years ago the Salt Lake was much nearer to Calcutta than at present. At a village called Ramkrishnapore, a mile from the high road leading to Dum Dum, is a mound or tumulus of about thirty feet in height, surrounded by two venerable *peepul* trees, from either of which, if ascended by help of a ladder, a magnificent view of the surrounding country and of the Lake's whole expanse may be had. This mound which retains its native name of Dum Dumma, not forty years ago, was on the edge of the Lake; it is said to have been raised by the Burmese or Mug traders who frequented the port and used to anchor their boats at this place. The lake has now receded nearly a mile from its foot, and the whole circumference has been gradually contracting in a similar way for many years. The present area of the lake comprises a surface of about 17,000 acres, or about 26 square miles." The presence of "wild buffaloes" in the Tarda region near Calcutta is indicated in Claude Martin's Survey Map, 1767.

\* <sup>8</sup> *Chithas* or land measurement records of 1793 in the Alipur Collectorate,

The English selected for the site of their first settlement in Calcutta the highest level of ground on the riverside. But the swamps did not readily yield ground. The salt water lake about "three miles to the south-eastward" overflowed "in September and October and then a prodigious number of fish resort but in November and December, when the floods are dissipated, the fishes are left high and dry and with their putrefaction affect the air with thick stinking vapours which the north-east winds bring with them to Fort William that there cause a yearly mortality."<sup>9</sup>

The precise extent of this mortality cannot be ascertained but it must have been shocking enough in the early years of the settlement to leave a kind of haunting memory reinforced almost till the mid-19th century by the miasma paying an occasional visit to the nervously protected English homes.<sup>10</sup> The English passion for drainage and against all spontaneous vegetation had by the mid-18th century led to the growth of a cluster round the fort that had a powerful element of planning in it. Visually, however, it might have looked peculiarly irregular to a European observer as it did to Alexander Hamilton, who remarked that it resembled the growth around a baronial castle of mediaeval Europe.<sup>11</sup>

In basic design the settlement was in line with European urban transplants on the maritime belt of Asia, arising out of the needs of defence, hygiene and exclusiveness, growing round the semblance of a mediaeval baronial castle. The technique of utilisation of highly limited space proceeded from pragmatic considerations rather than from preconceived

Calcutta, relating to Panchannagram, or 55 villages close to the city proper, give an impression of the nature of cultivation and settlement in marshy low land. Also, an idea of traditional habitation in the area can be formed from a view of some of the fringes of the present city. See also Chapter II, section I of this book and *Extracts from the Topography and Vital Statistics of Calcutta* (1840) by F. B. Strong, pp. 1-11.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies* (1727), quoted in H. E. A. Cotton, *Calcutta, Old and New*, Calcutta, 1907, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> F. B. Strong, op. cit., Letter from F. B. Strong, August 29, 1837, to Mr. Smith Esquire.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, ed. William Foster, 1930, pp. 5-10.

notions of planning that can be related to contemporary urban development programmes in Europe. The town planner was the merchant, acting in corporate capacity and contemplating the available space in terms of relative advantages and disadvantages. The European urban transplant is a highly interesting historical phenomenon but strikingly free from complexity. It was an interesting form, but even at the height of its elegance, its soul lay in the vaults of a commercial house.

By the middle of the 18th century the settlement around the fort (the old fort was shortly to be replaced by a new one to be built almost half a mile to the south of the old site) had taken the form of a commercial, administrative, residential and military complex within an area of roughly two hundred and fifty acres on the banks of the Hooghly. A plan of this part of the town was prepared by Lieutenant Wills of the Royal Artillery.<sup>12</sup> The area looks densely packed but the houses nevertheless have wide compounds mostly utilised for gardens, as Hamilton observed.

A plan of the territory of Calcutta in 1742 from an MS. drawing by Forresti and Ollifres in the British Museum shows the area as a kind of "fenced city". The plan bears a note: "within the Compass of the Pallisades lived the Europeans and Christians".<sup>13</sup> The Christians were obviously the Armenians and the Portuguese whose churches are marked on the northern fringe of the area shown on the map and who are clearly mentioned as having been brought within the defensive arrangement of the area called the white town. Another plan of the same period, Scrafton's Plan of Calcutta,<sup>14</sup> shows scattered masonry (*pucca*) buildings in the "native quarter" and the Maratha Ditch which surrounds the black town. The settlement extended along the curve of the river about three and a half miles and inland probably up to a maximum breadth of one and a half miles. "Where they

<sup>12</sup> The plan is reproduced in A. K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, Census of India, 1901, vol. 7.

<sup>13</sup> C. R. Wilson, *Old Fort William in Bengal*, 1906, vol. 2, plate VI.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, plate XII.



[the houses in the white town] ended, began the habitations of the most considerable part of the natives with their markets or bazars. All the good buildings of the quarter are comprised within the same distance from the river as that which contains the English town, behind which as well as behind the whole of this northern quarter is a suburb of mud houses extending still further eastward half a mile and inhabited by great multitudes of the common people. Where the English town ends to the southward begins another continuation of houses which extends to the southern extremity of the Company's territory. Very few considerable families of the natives resided in the quarter."<sup>15</sup>

The earliest documentary evidence for a reasonably comprehensive physical picture of the territory destined to grow as the city of Calcutta is the account of a survey conducted by the Company in 1707.<sup>16</sup> The great Bazar about half a mile to the north of the old fort was already the most populous built-up area, having 400 bighas built over out of its entire area of 488 bighas. Houses with grounds account for 248 bighas out of 1,717 in Town Calcutta and 134 bighas out of 1,692 in Sutanuti and 51 out of 1,178 in Gobindapur. The extent of jungle was 263 bighas in Town Calcutta, 487 in Sutanuti, and 510 bighas in Gobindapur, no reference being made to jungle in the Bazar. The Bazar had a fairly high proportion of gardens and property granted rent-free to Brahmins but apparently no land under paddy cultivation, which accounted for a very high proportion of land in Town Calcutta (484 bighas), Sutanuti (515 bighas) and Gobindapur (510 bighas). If the figures—there are many other items like “plant[a]ins”, “Green trade”, “Tobacco”, etc.—are even rough approximations, they tend to strengthen the impression about jungle hamlets emerging into agricultural and business-oriented areas. The impression is further strengthened by Holwell's (Holwell was the Collector of

<sup>15</sup> *Orme Fragments* (1762), quoted in C. R. Wilson, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 169.

<sup>16</sup> C. R. Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, vol. 1, pp. 284-86. The unit of land measurement used in the survey is *bigha*, which is roughly one-third of an acre or 1600 square yards.

Calcutta from 1752 to 1756) zestful comments on the steady growth of Calcutta's markets and the increase of revenue from them.<sup>17</sup>

### III

In the embryonic state of its development, that is, by the beginning of the 18th century, Calcutta, or what was to become Calcutta later in the century, consisted of European Calcutta (a part of the old revenue unit or *dih* of Kalikata), a residential village with some sacred traits (Gobindapur), a traditional Indian bazar settlement (Bazar Calcutta, later on called Burrabazar) and a riverine mart specialising traditionally in cloth trade (Sutanuti). These were surrounded by peripheral hamlets (*dihis*), forming a varied range of agricultural and fishing settlements, sacred spots, trading halts or nodal points and jungles of various densities.

As the urban area began to grow and spread, the component units tended to coalesce and interpenetrate, retaining at the same time elements of segregation or developing new ones. The process worked in an overall setting of dualism, basically a feature of all colonial cities, between the white and the black town. The phenomenon of dualism, in its origin derived from the pre-colonial trading settlement pattern, reflected the concern of the Europeans with defence and security, manifested in the fort and the fence, and the concern of the "natives" about maintaining their own mode of social and economic organisation. In the colonial setting the fort progressively became an embellishment, retaining an accommodational function, and the fence fell down. The black town shed some of its aloofness and drove wedges into the white town, especially into the intermediate zone—the grey town, so to speak, of the Portuguese, Greeks and Armenians of the pre-colonial period—which was considered a ritually impure zone by the dominant social groups of the

<sup>17</sup> Holwell, *India Tracts*, 1774, section III, "Important Facts regarding East India Company's Affairs in Bengal from 1752 to 1760".

black town as is suggested by the original names of the localities of the area.

The areas of interpenetration between the white and the black town—the European and the Indian town—represented much denser formations than areas which tended towards European exclusiveness. But the areas of European exclusiveness were distinct and articulate expressions of the principles underlying the organisation of the European town—principles which sharply underscored the dualism of urban space in a colonial city.

The European town, at the economic level, tended to specialise in a relatively narrow sector of the total economic activity of the region of Calcutta—narrow but highly capital-intensive and part of a vast global network or system—reducing shopkeeping to a minimum and tending to eliminate the marginal operator, thus creating a business area populous by day and deserted by night in the Tank Square. At the level of physical planning the European could look to the baroque and the early Victorian city of Europe as representing a life style, oblivious of the congestion and decay behind the impressive façade, and apply his notions of real estate development and capital investment in potentially high-value residential or business area.<sup>18</sup> The European was threatened by the “native” squatters<sup>19</sup> but he could not do

<sup>18</sup> See section VI of this chapter for references to the work of the Lottery Committee for the Improvement of Calcutta.

<sup>19</sup> “But with all its advantages, do not imagine that Chowringhee is a paradise, one of those localities that every person desires to live in. Bishop Heber, in a cursory notice of Moscow, informs us that in that city the palace and the hut are often close to each other. This may be said to be the case, though most probably not so often, in Chowringhee. The road has on its eastern side many colonnaded mansions in the Grecian style and which have indeed a fine effect when viewed from the river, but it has also in the very front of it a cluster of miserable native huts, tenanted by some two hundred natives. This incongruous neighbourhood of huts and lowest Soodras to palaces and European magnates speedily banishes from the mind of the near spectator the paradisiacal notions he may entertain about Chowringhee. The splendid mansion loses half of its architectural attraction when it is beside a collection of mud and bamboo huts. For the good of the fair name and for the sake of the fair ladies of Chowringhee, it would be desirable that a north-western would one of these days blow down every hut in this

without his milkmen, washermen and domestic servants,<sup>20</sup> who had to live very close. The miasma from the Crooked Lane or Janbazar,<sup>21</sup> in close proximity to the areas of European exclusiveness, had to be tolerated, and the congestion of China Bazar or Cossitola (areas of both wholesale and retail business attached to the European town) was a necessary evil. Even so the formal municipal procedures had to be applied along with western notions of formal institutional development. The Asiatic Society, the Town Hall, the Public Library (the Metcalfe Hall) and the exclusive clubs had been taking shape from the late 18th to mid-19th century.

The spurts of road-building activity,<sup>22</sup> accompanied by plans for drainage, represented sincere professional efforts to isolate zones which could develop on the basis of econo-

and in other parts of the district, and if this sweeping away can be done by a north-western without injury to the persons and goods and chattels of the natives who settle down in these places, it will be a consummation most earnestly to be wished by every white face in Chowringhee." Griffin (pseud.), *Sketches of Calcutta*, Edinburgh, 1843, p. 315.

<sup>20</sup> "The Commissioners [Municipal] have in their last Annual Report, adverted to the inconvenience to the European residents which might result by the removal of domestic servants occupying similar Bustees and forced to migrate to other localities." Judicial Proceedings, October 13, 1859.

<sup>21</sup> "Crooked Lane was only a few yards from the Governor-General's mansion . . . On the east of the Crooked Lane, there is a regular Bustee [hutments or slum] all clotted together, and the place altogether is always in a most filthy state occasioning most abominable stench, whenever the wind blows from the south-east." (General Committee of the Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvement, evidence taken by the sub-committee, 1836-1838, April 1837) References to the filthy state of Janbazar occur several times in the Lottery Committee Proceedings, vols. 1, 2 and 3. The vulnerability of Chowringhee to the miasma from the surrounding country is thus reported: "Dr. Stewart has no doubt that the miasma generated by the state of the suburbs, extends to affect the salubrity of Calcutta and Chowringhee." Report of the General Committee of the Fever Hospital, 1840, pp. 51-52.

<sup>22</sup> A. K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, Census of India, 1901, vol. 7, pt. I., chap. X, "Municipal and Sanitary", pp. 67-78; Lottery Committee Proceedings, February 12, 1818, September 7, 1820, March 23, 1820; Minute by Mr. Shakespeare for the consideration of the Lottery Committee, February 3, 1820; Minute by Mr. Gordon, February 13, 1820. Report of the General Committee of the Fever Hospital, 1840, Note on the Medical Topography of Calcutta and its Suburbs, chiefly with reference to the condition of the Native Health, Appendix A, p. 8; Minute by the Chief Magistrate, Appendix A, pp. 1-3.

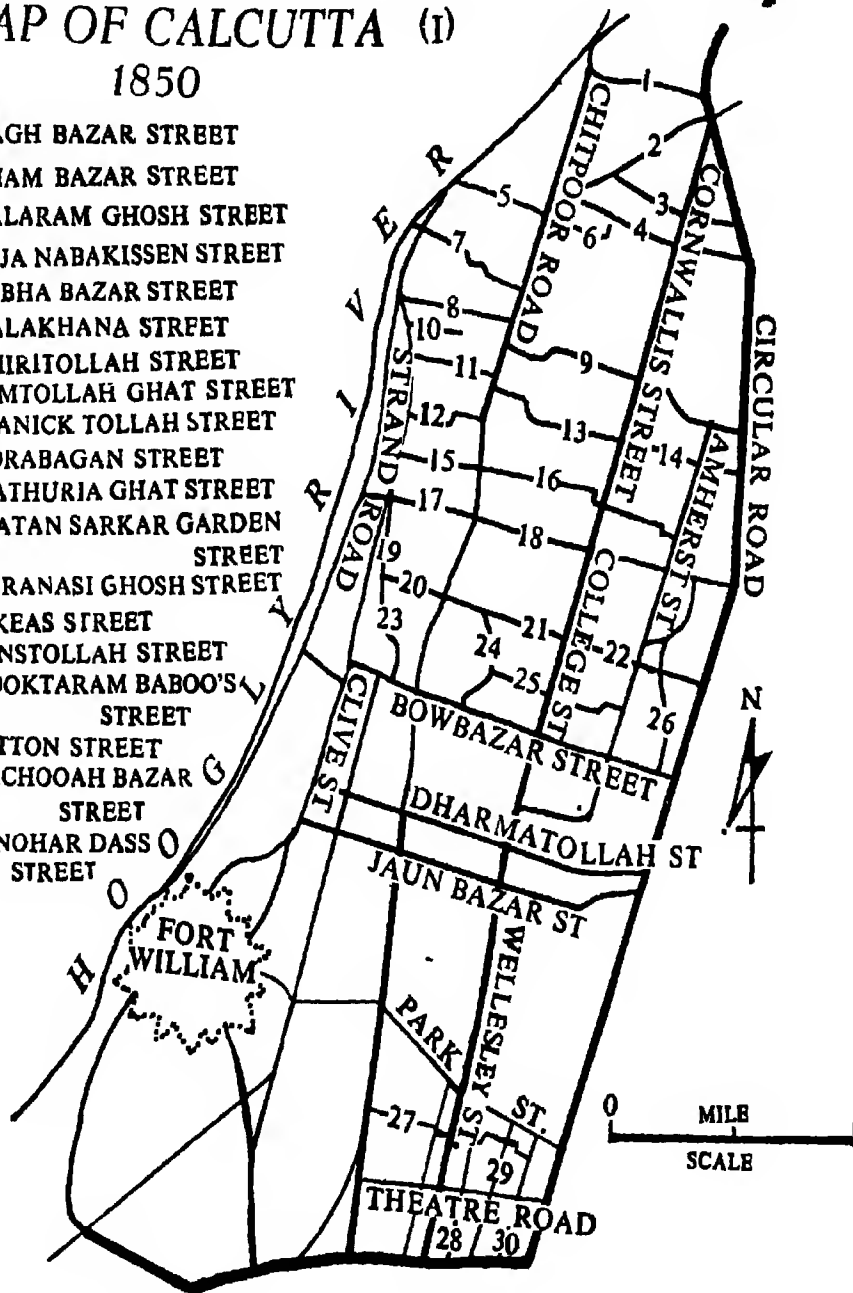
# MAP OF CALCUTTA (I)

1850

- (1) BAGH BAZAR STREET
- (2) SHAM BAZAR STREET
- (3) BALARAM GHOSH STREET
- (4) RAJA NABAKISSEN STREET
- (5) SOBHA BAZAR STREET
- (6) BALAKHANA STREET
- (7) AHIRITOLLAH STREET
- (8) NIMTOLLAH GHAT STREET
- (9) MANICK TOLLAH STREET
- (10) JORABAGAN STREET
- (11) PATHURIA GHAT STREET
- (12) RATAN SARKAR GARDEN STREET
- (13) BARANASI GHOSH STREET
- (14) SUKEAS STREET
- (15) BANSTOLLAH STREET
- (16) MOOKTARAM BABOO'S STREET
- (17) COTTON STREET
- (18) MACHOOAH BAZAR STREET
- (19) MONOHAR DASS STREET

- (20) MOORGY HATTA STREET
- (21) COLOOTOLLAH STREET
- (22) MIRZAPOOR STREET
- (23) OLD CHINA BAZAR STREET
- (24) CHUNA GULLY
- (25) CHAMPATOLLAH LANE
- (26) OLD BYTAKHANA BAZAR STREET

- (27) MIDDLETON STREET
- (28) HUNGERFORD STREET
- (29) LOUDON STREET
- (30) RAWDON STREET



*memoria*

mic and social class, bringing out the full logic of ground rent and land value. Some of the earliest road-building activities had been in the mixed zones bordering on the original nucleus of the European town and extending in suburb-like formation along a narrow section of the eastern limit of the city. But the land was mostly purchased by men of very modest resources, who invested their meagre savings in minuscule urban properties,<sup>23</sup> tending to create an overwhelming slum condition, not so much on the main roads as on areas close to them. By the early 19th century the slums and the accompanying jungle had engulfed the better class mixed European and Indian residential area on the upper south-eastern fringe of the city.<sup>24</sup> In the northern part of the city with its relatively superior resources, the second main artery of the Indian town—the Cornwallis-College Street axis—partially fulfilled the expectations of its European planners.<sup>25</sup> Along this axis would tend to develop in the late 19th century some of the cherished institutions of the Bengali middle class and more specialised residential neighbourhoods than could be seen on the older axis—the Chitpur Road.<sup>26</sup> The slums, however, were physically very close and would tend to encircle better class housing at many points.

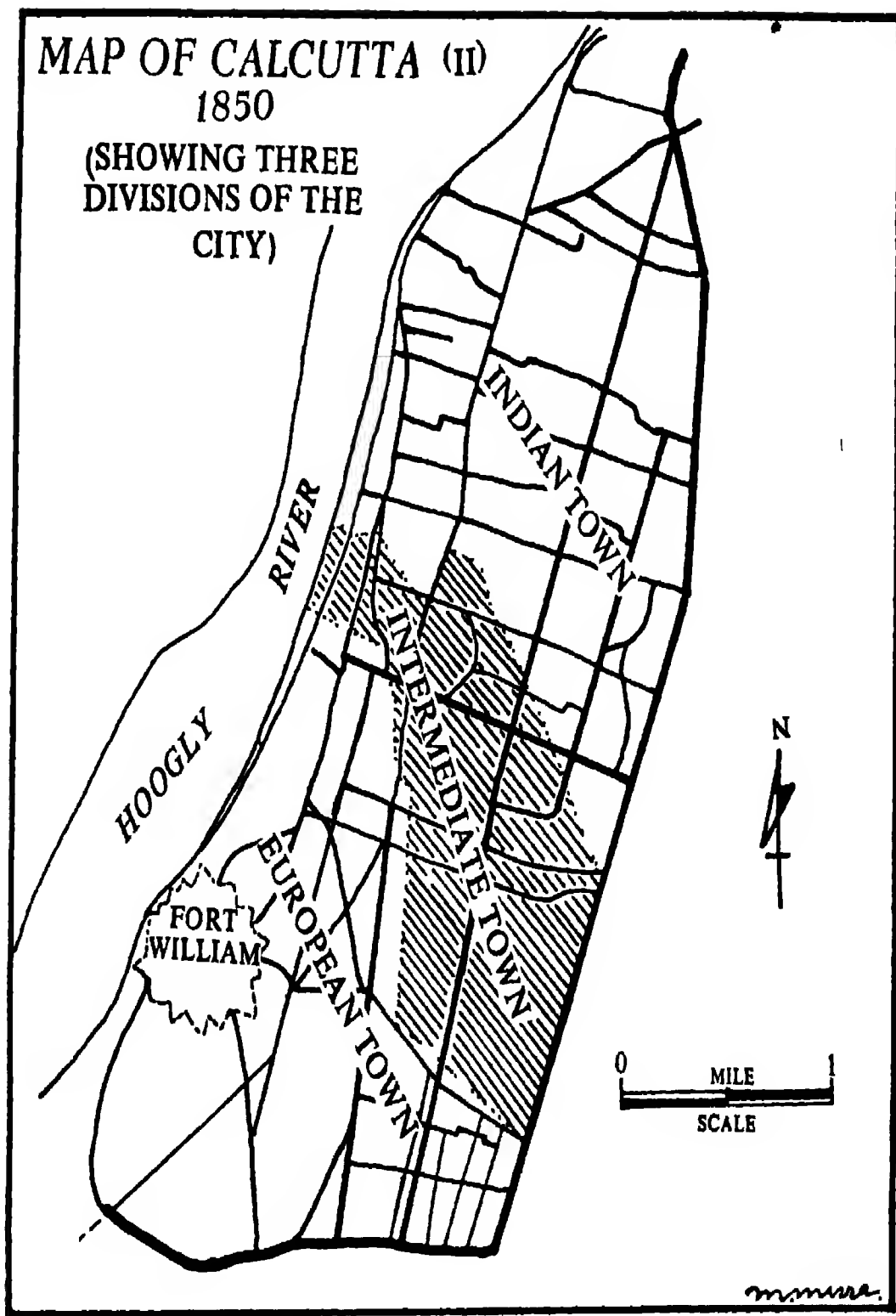
Urban growth along the Cornwallis Street-College Street axis was, at least in the initial stage, a direct result of the intervention of European planning. The older axis of Chitpur Road and the whole complex of roads (lanes, by-lanes) connected with it were far removed from any such intervention

<sup>23</sup> Some of the earliest purchasers of land on one of the main thoroughfares in the intermediate zone were Jungoo Calassy (sailor), Ramjahn Peon (messenger), Janoda Chobdar (stick-bearer to Anglo-Indian officials of rank), Noccoo Khidmutgar (table-servant), Sahcer Scrang (boatswain of a small ship). (Proceedings of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, Fort William, June 1, 1778.) The customary breadth of the passage to the highway, three cubits (about 54"), was maintained, according to the Amin or revenue surveyor. This might be the origin of the lanes and alleys of the city.

<sup>24</sup> "There are to be observed remnants of several old roads made by the late John Elliot, but most of them are covered with *jungal*, their ditches filled up, their bridges broken. . . ." F. B. Strong, *Extracts from the Topography and Vital Statistics of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1840, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> See Map I and section VI of this chapter.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



MAP II

and represented both a historical relic and a base for urban expansion. The original nucleus of this area was the Bazar—the central wholesale market with its ramifications where the “Black Merchants” used to live in the early 18th century. By the beginning of the 18th century the Bazar had become, for all practical purposes, much more important<sup>27</sup> than the original residential village—Gobindapur, the village of ancestors, the “sacred” village heavy with memories and legends,—to which all the old families of Calcutta—the Dattas, the Setts and Basaks, the Tagores and the Debs, among others—trace back their origin. The “infamy” of the Bazar settlement was being slowly removed when the dismantling of the whole Gobindapur village by British imperial fiat to make way for the new fort perforce added an altogether new dimension to the great Bazar.<sup>28</sup> The “sacred” ancestral village disappeared as if swallowed by a river inundation and the villagers had to seek new spots for their residences and family deities. The Setts, the merchant-weavers of Calcutta—the suppliers of cotton goods to the Company—removed their family deity, Gobindaji, to a spot in Burrabazar (the temple still exists in a dilapidated form).

#### IV

With the rapid development of Calcutta and the growth of its population—the Maratha scare was one of the major factors in the mid-18th century<sup>29</sup>—and the continued decline

<sup>27</sup> The great Bazar was the most populous built-up area in Calcutta in 1707, according to the survey conducted by the Company in 1707 Consultation, June 12, 1707 in C. R. Wilson, *Early Annals*, vol. 1, p. 284.

<sup>28</sup> References to the dismantling of the village Govindapur occur in Letter to the Court, January 10, 1758, as printed in Rev. J. Long, *Selections from Unpublished Records of Govt*, Calcutta, 1869, p. 117; Proceedings of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, Fort William, August 14, 1775, and in Lottery Committee Papers (1817-1821).

<sup>29</sup> See A. K. Ray, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-65. References to scarcity of provisions in Calcutta because of increased population due to Maratha raids occur in Mayor's Court Records. At an “Extraordinary Meeting . . . in the Consultation Room of Fort Wm. His Majesty's Justices [opined that] the Gentlemen of the Grand Jury have mistaken the causes of the grievances they present



## 1750 - 1850

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- MAP OF CALCUTTA (III)**  
1750 - 1850
- Legend:**
- 1 WRITERS' BUILDING
  - 2 NEW CHINA BAZAR
  - 3 PORTUGUESE CHURCH
  - 4 MACHOOAH BAZAR
  - 5 COLLEGE SQUARE
  - 6 CORNWALLIS SQ
  - 7 BYTAKHANA BAZAR
  - 8 HATKHOLA BAZAR
  - 9 CHARAK DANGA
- Map Labels:**
- River:** HOOGHLY RIVER
  - Fort:** FORT (Gobinda-poor)
  - Race Course:** RACE COURSE
  - Districts:** DIHI CALCUTTA, DINGA BHANGA, COLINGA CHOWRANGEE, TALPUKUR, BURRA BAZAR, JELLIAH, THANA, PATAL DANGA, KARBALA, HOGOL KURIA, SOBHA BAZAR, DARJEE PARA, KANSARI PARA, TORASANKO, JORABAG, AHIRI, TOLLAH, SUTANUTI, PATHURIA, IGHTA, KUMAR TULLI, SHAM BAZAR, BAGH BAZAR.
  - Ghats:** Rathtollah Ghat, Sutanuti Ghat, Ruplal Babu Ghat, Rammohan Mallik Ghat, Clive St Ghat.
  - Other Labels:** Khidirpore, Dibi Bhabanipoor, Dibi Birjee, Dibi Chakrabere, Dibi Sreerampoor, Balligunj, Dibi Entally, Dibi Syalda TO BALIAGHATA & SALT LAKES, Dibi Shore, Dibi Ultadanga, Dibi Chitrapore, Dibi Dukin Pakpara, Dibi Bahar Simla, Dibi Chitrapore.
  - Scale:** 0 MILE 1
  - Compass:** N, S, E, W

### MAP III

of Hooghly and Murshidabad,<sup>30</sup> the older cities, in the late 18th and early 19th century, the great Bazar was taking on an increasingly complex and cosmopolitan character. The intensity of specialisation in textiles of which the merchant-weavers of Bengal—the Setts and Basaks—had a monopoly tended to decrease. And with the undoubted gravitation of mixed merchant groups to Calcutta the barriers between the intermediate town and the original Bazar fell, leading to the development of Puggeya Putty, Monhor Das Chowk, Cotton Street, Armenian Street, Radha Bazar and China Bazar as distinct areas in a vast network of bazars.

The cosmopolitan bazar network of the late 18th century had features of both positive and negative significance for the urban development of Calcutta. India, for centuries, had coastal port towns and cosmopolitan bazar towns, whose heterogeneity at one point had been a source of the weakness of her urban tradition. The organisational set-up in such urban centres had stopped short of crystallising at a point where the tradition of the cosmopolitan port or bazar town could meet the less diffuse local or regional tradition.

In the second half of the 18th century a point of crystallisation was achieved in Calcutta. The Bazar had become the focus for a large part of the urban area. A rapid succession of stages of development had transformed the whole northern part of the city, forcing the hamlets on the nearer

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[on 22nd November, 1750]. . . . The increase of inhabitants of this settlement and the suburbs thereof since the invasion of the Marathas in the kingdom has been the natural cause of dearness and scarcity of provisions . . . therefore to strike . . . at the root of the evil we recommend to the Gentlemen of the Jury . . . and European inhabitants to retrench the superfluities of their own tables. . . . The Gentlemen of the Grand Jury are equally mistaken in the causes they assign for the dearness of firewood which has [arisen] solely from the great increase of buildings in the settlement and as a consequence the very unusual consumption in the burning of bricks. . . .” Fort William, Tuesday, August 15, 1755, MCSCR.

<sup>30</sup> S. Chaudhuri, “The Rise and Decline of Hugli”, *Bengal, Past and Present*, vol. 86, 1967. In a letter to Maharaja Nabakrishna, Political Banyan to the Company, Muhammad Reza Khan, Naib Nazim and Deputy Governor of Bengal, comments, “If business in Calcutta is like a river, it is like a drop of water in Murshidabad.” *CPC*, vol. 2, (1767-1769).

periphery into the traditional mould of *tola*, *tuli* and *para*, creating new bazars and developing old ones. The impulse of the bazar combined with comprador economic and social activity. The compradors, that is, the *dewans* and banians representing the upper echelons of a large body of intermediaries, lifted a basically bazar town to a further stage of development. The hectic building activity and land purchase in Calcutta from the mid-18th to the early 19th century must have stemmed from a relatively new notion of real property.<sup>31</sup> The prized possessions were bazars and tenanted land (*bustee*).

At the cultural and social level, the compradors, however, were re-enacting a role expected of the "zamindar-rajās" in the little *rajyas* (chiefdoms) of the earlier period. These little *rajyas* accommodated centres where a kind of urbanism, at a level other than that of commercial cities or great politico-military centres, persisted through the centuries.<sup>32</sup> It is in these centres that notions of Hindu cosmology could find some expression. In the new urban set-up in Calcutta, the banian, in his elaborate household, could very well elevate himself or be elevated to the pinnacle of local society, imagining himself or being imagined as a mythical king. He did not need to have any compunction about disregarding the caste ecology in Calcutta. The caste-based physical layout of the mid-18th century Calcutta was forcefully altered by comprador intervention, among other factors. The comprador purchased land and settled it with tenants. Rent was

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta". References to property as sacred start occurring in revenue records from the late 18th century. See, for example, "The Humble Petition of William Swallow" in connection with the reorganisation of the English town involving the filling up of the ditch near the Council House and the removal of huts in the vicinity of European houses. (Proceedings of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, August 29, 1775.) Appendix III of this book shows that rich "natives" owned extensive real estates in the English town which they rented out to Europeans.

<sup>32</sup> Edward C. Dimock (Jr.) and Ronald B. Inden, "The City in Pre-British Bengal", and Philip B. Calkins, "The Role of Murshidabad as a Regional and Sub-regional Centre in Bengal", in *Urban Bengal*, Occasional Papers, South Asia Series, ed. R. L. Park, Asian Studies Centre, Michigan, 1969.

his primary concern. He had, however, to distribute patronage on an elaborate scale—he had to acquire prestige and status. Comprador syncretism went further than the sphere within which the traditional zamindars and courtiers acted. The comprador played a key social role in the emergence of an urban society from the relatively fluid situation of the bazar.

A visual impression of comprador syncretism can be obtained from the building style of the late 18th and the early 19th century, reflecting Hindu, Muslim and British influences.<sup>33</sup> While the blending was superficial, no artificiality was represented by the central courtyard which was for worship and for social and cultural gatherings such as dramatic performances and impromptu versification. At the level of adapting the great tradition this area played a key functional role. Cultural refinement was in many respects a legacy of upper Indian court tradition. Worship and rituals, however, were not matters of refinement but key elements in the adaptation of the great tradition.

The “comprador-rajās”, acting at a socio-cultural level, emphasised an image of the city which was not far removed from the image of rival villages. The intensity of rivalry between different social factions tended to strengthen the image. In fact, the “villages” were getting steadily mixed up, though the image of the “village” often survived, reflecting a lag in the consciousness where the reality had changed.<sup>34</sup>

At a more realistic and objective level, the Indian town was increasingly reflecting, in its physical set-up, those principles which distinguished it from the European town.

<sup>33</sup> For a description of houses owned by relatively rich people, see Appendix IV—“Structural Pattern of Buildings in Old Calcutta” and illustrations on pp. 24, 25, 77 and 78 in this book.

<sup>34</sup> See Map III for the distribution of some of the “villages” in the Indian town and also in the intermediate town. In the 18th and early 19th century testamentary documents in the Calcutta High Court the Bengali testators and witnesses invariably mention the old village names as their places of residence. This is also true of correspondents in early 19th century newspapers such as *Samachar Darpan* (1818-1840).

The bazar as an economic and spatial organisation tends to draw a huge and mixed crowd of people many of whom may be only marginally connected with the main channel of the economic activity of the bazar. In the context of a large city the bazar stands for the central wholesale market with its ramifications within the urban space and beyond it. It does not mean "that particular area of sheds and platforms, set apart in the centre of the town". It is a system "in which the total flow of commerce is fragmented into a great number of person to person transactions".<sup>35</sup> It can employ vast numbers of people on a marginal or near-marginal level of living. The tremendous overcrowding of the market network by marginal operators goes some way to explain the confused tumult of the bazar.

The basic tendency in the economic organisation of the European town of Calcutta was to cut down the number of people in a transaction. The reverse tendency operated in the Indian town, a tendency reinforced and carried forward by the comprador-landlord who caused the development of a spatial organisation based on the idea of "peopling it". A petition from Dewan Kashinath, a Khatri (north-Indian) merchant, praying to the government for being allowed to farm a bazar in Calcutta is worded thus: "I am desirous of increasing its cultivation and peopling it with shop-keepers and others I will invite to settle in it."<sup>36</sup>

Most of the old urban landlord families of Calcutta claim to be descended from the "jungle clearing inhabitants" of Calcutta. This is an expression of the reality of the "talukdari patta"—the rural landlord's title deed—repeated in an altogether different setting. The net effect of the extension of this reality was the crowding of urban space for the rent income of the urban landlord. Land was cleared so that it could yield immediate income. The landlord himself had no conception of the opulent or middle class residential area. The houses of the opulent "comprador-landlord-rajahs" would be surrounded

<sup>35</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Pedlars and Princes*, Chicago, 1963, p. 28.      ♦

<sup>36</sup> Proceedings of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, Fort William, October 24, 1774.

with huts or embedded in slums.<sup>37</sup> There would be a tendency to maximise the rent income by appropriating available open space or former gardens (generally open plots with coconut, areca-nut and palmyra trees and thick or light low jungle with a pond or two) for the erection of huts. As regards ground rent and land value, their logic would operate subject to the strong pull of socio-cultural and socio-legal factors mainly associated with the joint family estates. Unoccupied and ruined houses would be a common feature of the localities of the Indian town<sup>38</sup> and their number would tend to be independent of the operation of economic forces. A populous area in these circumstances might look deserted.<sup>39</sup>

The urban landlords, as a social force behind urbanisation, could make the physical city reflect many of their own concerns, preoccupations and priorities. Though relatively rich to begin with, the landlord families could decay within one or two generations from the pressure of numbers. An imposing structure might look like a rabbit-warren or be covered with jungle because of the neglect of the co-sharers or the receivers appointed by the law-court. A house might be built on a grand scale with the firm conviction that seven generations would live there. It might have imposing pseudo-Corinthian pillars in the style of the public buildings in the European town, whose plaster might peel off in twenty years, the succeeding generations being too busy

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix V—"Some Representative Bengali Neighbourhoods",—Raja Nobkissen's Street. The clusters of huts surrounding the residences of Maharaja Bahadurs of Sobhabazar—one of the most important complexes of opulent households—are clearly enumerated. The distribution and extent of clusters of huts can be ascertained from a variety of sources such as Plan of the City of Calcutta (1825) by J. A. Schalch; Report on the Survey of Calcutta (1851) by F. W. Simms; City and Environs of Calcutta, 1852-1856; Plan of Calcutta from Actual Survey, 1847-1849, by F. W. Simms.

<sup>38</sup> General Committee of the Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvements, Evidence before the Second Sub-Committee, 1836-1838, pp. 5-45.

<sup>39</sup> "In the visits which the Magistrates are constantly making to various parts of the town... they are perpetually struck with the appearance of decayed premises either vacant or occupied by remnants of wealthy families." H. D. Sandeman (ed.), *Selections from the Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 5, pp. 473-75.

quarrelling or making ends meet. In this setting the sublime could not be long segregated from the awful. And in this setting urban property would tend to be a counterpart of rural agricultural holding under the overall pull of subsistence orientation.

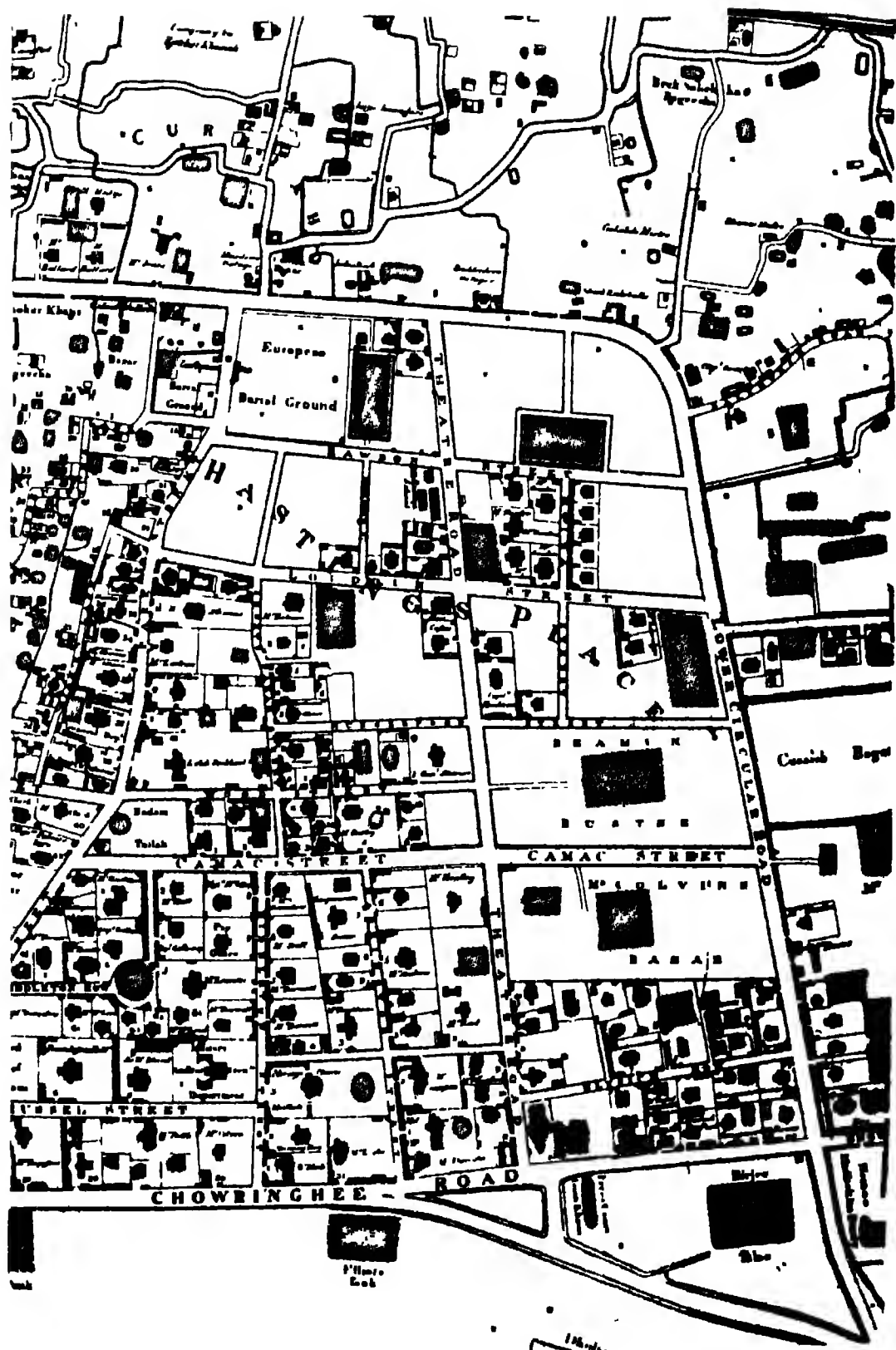
## V

The physical proximity of bare subsistence does not, however, reduce the significance of opulent households in the transformation of Calcutta from its earlier mould of *tolas*, *tulis* or *paras*—all meaning localities—dominated generally by particular castes or occupational groups. The opulent households or prominent family residences tended to draw clusters of people around them. These people were needed for service. The relationship between masonry houses (*kothabari*) and hutments (slum) is partly a modern variant of this development.

The earliest of such clusters tended to develop in the Burrabazar area where the Sett-Basak families, who were suppliers of cotton goods to the Company up to the mid-eighteenth century and were also independent merchants, had their residences. The possession by the Sett-Basak families of extensive landed and house property in that area can be copiously documented from judicial records<sup>40</sup> and a lively perspective on the records can be gained by visually observing the “archaeological” traces in the area. A visual impression can be obtained of one of the clusters from the original site of the house of Sobharam Basak, the most successful Bengali merchant in Calcutta around mid-18th century. With a temple in the background and a Brahmin’s house in close vicinity, Sobharam Basak’s residence commanded what is now an extensive area in Burrabazar.

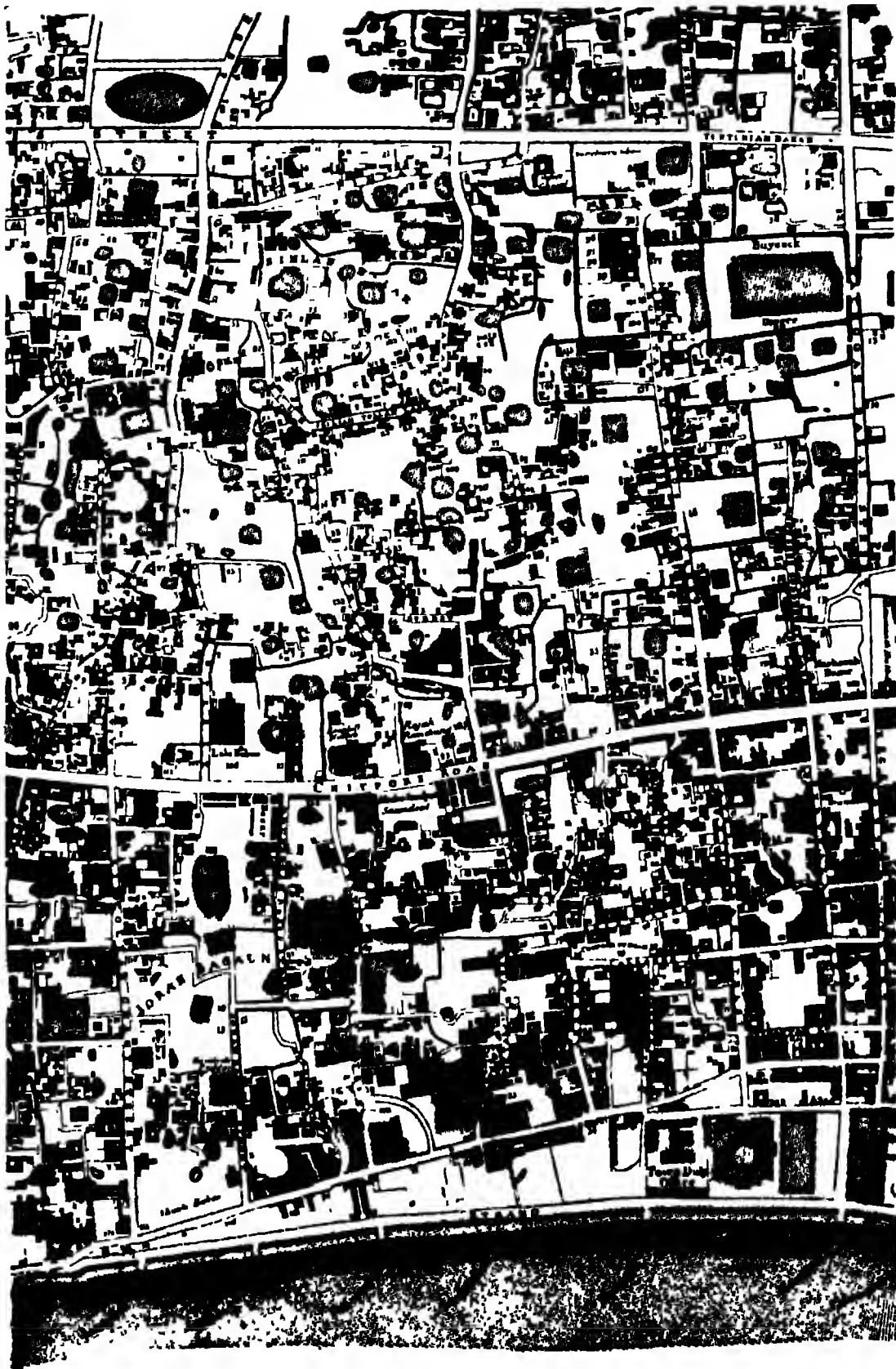
The most striking evidence of such a cluster is still visible around the residence of what was till recently called the

<sup>40</sup> See Appendix III—“Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta” and also Chapter III, section I of this book.



A section of the European town in Calcutta after Lottery Committee improvements. It illustrates European residences with compounds. Squares and rectangles marked grey are ponds excavated from old irregular pools of water. From the Plan by J. A. Schalch (1825).





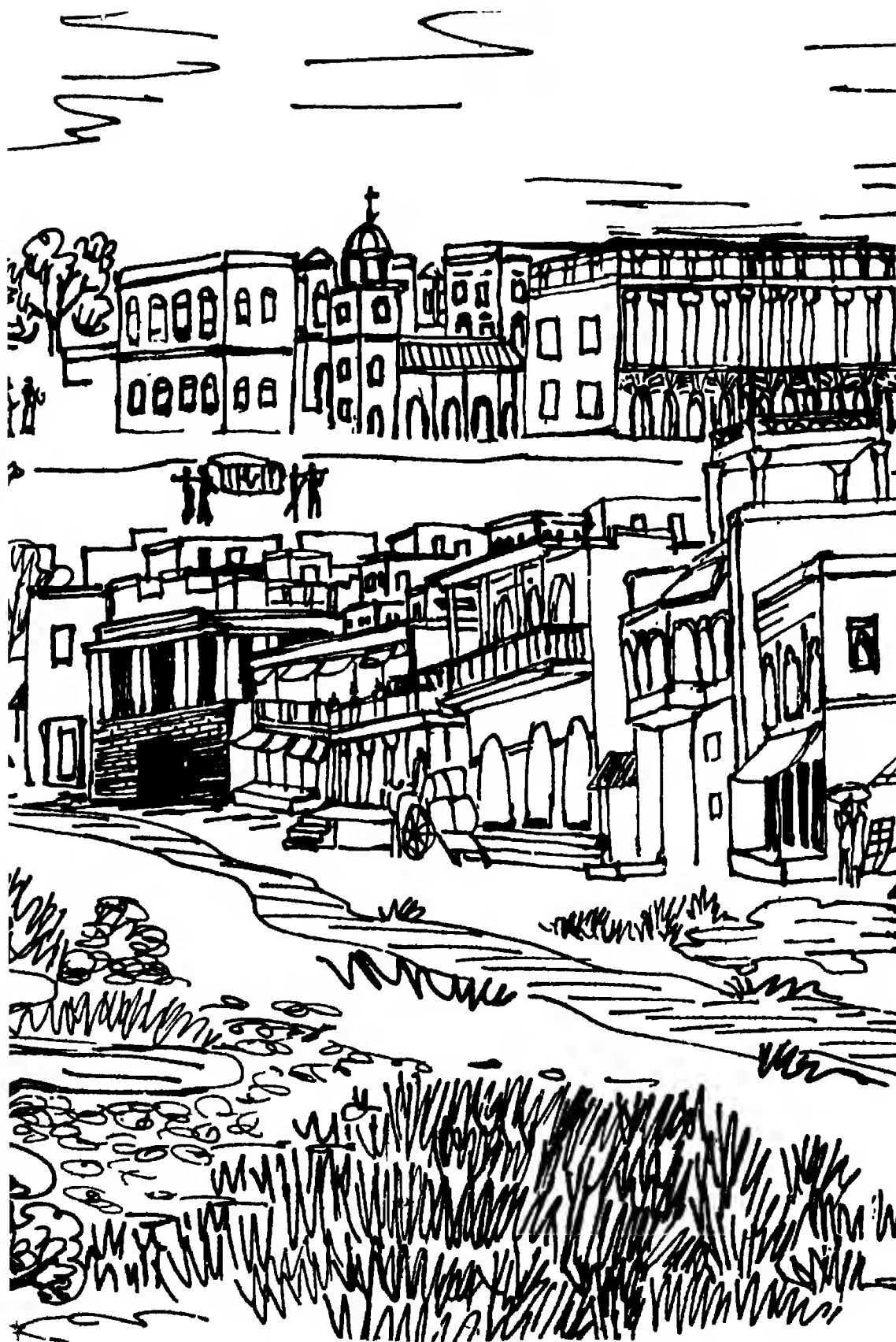
A section of the Indian town in Calcutta. The grey markings stand for ponds, the darker ones for masonry buildings and the white patches for empty spaces or hutments. From the Plan by J. A. Schach (1825).<sup>c</sup>



A section of the Indian town. The residences of the Debs are prominently marked. From Schalch's Plan (1825).



House types in the Indian and European town in the late 18th and the early



19th century. Hamlets and marshes surrounding the city are in the foreground.

*From contemporary pictorial material*

Sobhabazar Raj family. Founded on the wealth accumulated by Nabakrishna, who was the Political Banyan to the East India Company, becoming Raja and Maharaja in due course, the family attracted artisans, servants, scholars and dependants of all kinds.<sup>41</sup> The site of Nabakrishna's house is marked with unusual prominence on Upjohn's map and also on Schalch's Plan of Calcutta dated 1825. The contiguity of Sobhabazar, one of the largest regular markets in early Calcutta, and of extensive tenanted land owned by the family, can still be clearly observed. The Sobhabazar cluster was the earliest of such family clusters beyond the immemorial pilgrim road (Chitpur Road), which tended to confine the movement of opulent households further to the east of the sites of original settlements like Burrabazar, Hathkhola, Kumartuli, etc. While Nabakrishna sought to rival older families in attracting to his area a virtual community of people, he himself in his later years and his immediate successors had to reckon with the rivalry of more recently successful people like Ramdulal De, the Bengali millionaire (died 1825), who built his family residence in Simla below Sobhabazar.<sup>42</sup>

The rivalry between dominant families and the resultant formation of factions (*dal*) might thus have a fair degree of influence on the growth of settlements, presenting at one stage, maybe in the late 18th and early 19th century, a pattern of rival villages in what was developing as an urban region. The clusters, both of the caste groups and of opulent households, had a tendency to approximate to the physical type of a large village, but the tendency was checked or complicated by factors alien to traditional rural communities, such as the migration of diverse regional groups, making for more than usual heterogeneous condition.

The net result of this complex interplay of factors was the continuous physical growth of the Indian town and a steady

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter III, section II of this book. See also N. N. Ghose, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*, Calcutta, 1911, for a detailed account of the social activities of Nabakrishna and Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta", serial no. VI.

<sup>42</sup> See Map III.

residential orientation of what was once a collection of fishing hamlets, agricultural areas and riverine marts. The inventories of house and landed property in the custody of the Calcutta High Court reveal what must have been a process of hectic building activity and purchase of real estate within the city proper. Sobharam Basak, the successful mid-18th century merchant, had thirty-seven houses mainly in Burrabazar, besides ponds and gardens in central and north Calcutta.<sup>43</sup> When Ramdulal De died in 1825 he left houses and landed properties worth about five lakhs in Calcutta, yielding an annual rent of about twenty-five thousand rupees.<sup>44</sup> The Sinha family of Jorasanko had land and houses worth more than eight lakhs in 1820.<sup>45</sup> Dwarkanath Tagore, the successful early 19th century Bengali businessman, had made substantial investment in houses and land in Calcutta and the neighbourhood.<sup>46</sup> The opulent families had open plots of land, gardens and tanks on or just beyond the fringes of the city proper. In the late 18th and the early 19th century the areas attached to the dwelling houses of relatively well-to-do families were five to six bighas, in general, within the city proper.<sup>47</sup>

A comparison of Upjohn's map completed in 1793, and Schalch's Plan of Calcutta, dated 1825, confirms the impression gained from the study of judicial records. The value of Upjohn's map for the "native" part of Calcutta may be overestimated, for it is obviously very incomplete for that part of the city, but the visual impression from the two maps underscores a sharp transformation in the physical mould of the city. The tiny squares, representing masonry constructions in Upjohn's map, have been replaced by large dark blotches on Schalch's Plan of Calcutta. The more irregular gray markings on Schalch's Plan stand for innumerable pools mostly excavated to raise the level of land for masonry

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta", serial no. IV.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., serial No. VII.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., serial No. V.

• <sup>46</sup> N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III, p. 119.

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta".

constructions. The proceedings of the Lottery Committee, formed for the improvement of Calcutta in 1817, refer to huge blocks of property, particularly in the north and central parts of Calcutta, hampering efforts for construction of roads.<sup>48</sup> The reports and proceedings of the Fever Hospital for Calcutta from 1837 to 1840, particularly testimony before the Committee by individuals from the localities of central and north Calcutta, confirm the complete disappearance of agricultural land from the city proper and the dense state of habitation in the old city core outside the English town. A considerable portion of city surface, to the south-east of the city core, north of Manicktolla Street, and some areas even in northern dense city areas still consisted of open plots of land in 1825 and even in mid-century, but they were mostly held by rich families as sources of future profit and left covered with undergrowth interspersed with coconut, betel-nut or palmyra trees.

## VI

Despite the phenomenal increase in masonry constructions in the first half of the 19th century, the city of Calcutta was still predominantly a city of hutments, the thatched huts being replaced by tiled ones in 1837 by legislation. The trend towards neighbourhood formation on the basis of economic and social status met with constant obstacles from a basic apathy or perhaps tolerance on the part of middle class and opulent groups regarding the presence of the poor and destitute in close proximity to what might have developed into better class residential areas.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Minute by Dr. Gordon, February 13, 1820, Lottery Committee Papers. Dr. Gordon refers to the area between Chitpur and Circular Road.

<sup>49</sup> A European view of this aspect of the so-called "native" character is expressed in the following words: "In all other respects, a most intelligent native doctor who had been in my service for nearly twenty years, could not be made to understand that his continuance in his family house [which had possibilities of development as a middle class suburb of the then Calcutta (see 'Appendix V—'Some Representative Bengali Neighbourhoods')] at Bhowanipore surrounded by malaria would be the death of him. I often so assured him, and took the greatest pains for a year or two,

An obvious objective of the Lottery Committee for the Improvement of Calcutta was to furnish an impetus to the formation of better class neighbourhoods on the basis of planned layouts on both sides of a systematically developed highway.<sup>50</sup> The most conspicuous work of the Lottery Committee in the Indian town was the construction of a north to south highway from a point near the northern extremity of the city to its south-eastern edge (Cornwallis Street, Wellington Street, Wellesley Street), affording a visual contrast on the map to the traditional Chitpur Road.<sup>51</sup> The northern and central parts of the new highway passed through areas which tended to develop as more specialised functional zones, like the College Street, again affording a contrast to the highly mixed character of the zones closer to the Chitpur Road. The Lottery Committee ceased to function in 1836, the morality of holding lotteries for urban development having been questioned for some time in England. An unfortunate element in the Lottery Committee's work for Calcutta, the most systematic work in the 19th century, was the net effect of its planning, which was the further accentuation of the physical differences of the European and Indian parts of a colonial city. The planned development of a European residential zone to the south of the old European city area was no doubt one of the motivations behind the work of the Committee, but this did not pervade the entire planning programme which was motivated by genuine and admirable professional considerations.<sup>52</sup>

but all without effect; an old *jangal* piggery inhabited by *chamars* and pigs was the place of his residence, and his diseases were first intermittent and remittent fever, dysentery, spleen, and he died dropsical." F. B. Strong, *Topography and Vital Statistics of Calcutta*, 1840.

<sup>50</sup> "I have already stated that the value of ground in Calcutta generally rises in proportion to its contiguity to a great thoroughfare and that upon this circumstance rested the possibility of effecting the improvement I proposed." Lottery Committee Proceedings, February 3, 1820.

<sup>51</sup> See p. 10, Map I.

<sup>52</sup> "Adverting to the increasing European population of this Town we cannot doubt but the greatest part would be purchased in its improved state for the erection of Dwelling Houses at rates which would more than repay previous expenditure." Lottery Committee Proceedings, May 4, 1820;



Throughout the nineteenth century huge blocks of property tended to mass together in the space between the riverfront and the Cornwallis Street-College Street axis. The blocks were huge meshes characterised by virtual streetlessness.<sup>53</sup> The absence of a system of diagonals is evident from Schalch's Plan of Calcutta (1825) and from later maps and reports. Mechuabazar Street merged into the congested and narrow Cotton Street while approaching the riverfront and lost much of its usefulness as an east-west connection. Manicktolla Street was perhaps too unusual in its sinuosity but was a forceful illustration of the illogical end of a natural tendency towards an east-west link.<sup>54</sup> This aspect of the road system is illustrative of the completely undeveloped state of Calcutta's immediate suburbs. While "Dihi" Calcutta became Town Calcutta and later City Calcutta, the suburbs on the east remained absolutely undeveloped, the system of dumping city garbage in one of the eastern "dihis" in the late 19th century serving as a means of living through rummaging in the garbage.

The city itself, extending over seven square miles in 1850, was basically a city of hutments.<sup>55</sup> The hutments formed the great slums of Calcutta. The urban landlords, acting with a frame of mind influenced by both traditional and new notions, created in the slums of Calcutta a powerful trend towards urban heterogeneity. The composition of slum population, so far as it can be ascertained from two samples of hutment owners, was extremely diverse.<sup>56</sup> In these samples the owners of hutments, who had the positions of tenants *vis-à-vis* the landlords, represent a varied range of castes, occupations and linguistic background.

Prominent in both the samples are the retired courtesans;

also letter dated April 20, to John Trotter, Esq., Secretary to the Lottery Committee.

<sup>53</sup> F. W. Simms, Report on the Survey of Calcutta, 1951; E. P. Richards, Improvement Trust Report (1913).

<sup>54</sup> See p. 10, Map I.

<sup>55</sup> F. W. Simms, *op. cit.*, p. 43. Pucca (masonry) houses according to the Survey were 13,130 and huts were 49,445.

<sup>56</sup> F. W. Simms, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-71.

Hindusthani and Oriya names occur and a variety of occupations are mentioned such as thatchers of huts, sweepers, barbers, tailors, etc. Obviously the proprietors of tenanted lands were not concerned about maintaining a proper distribution of castes in a given space.

The slums, like the bazars, created a condition of urban heterogeneity representing a distinct socio-cultural world, very much urban but not crystallising at a point of organic development. In such a situation the slightest opportunity would lead to island-like or shell-like formations, representing a defensive attitude. Such an attitude would tend to be most intensive in the zones of interpenetration. A graphic example in mid-19th century was the area along the Bowbazar or the Dharamtala Street in the intermediate town of the city. In the Bowbazar area the traditional street names—probably of 18th century origin—indicated Hindu holy association or purely Bengali rural association. By the mid-19th century that area came to have a high concentration of Eurasians and Europeans of lower economic status, and some of the street names indicated ownership of land by a motley group of people not remotely connected with Hindu holiness.<sup>57</sup> (Down below Bowbazar Street, in the Dharamtala-Janbazar area the condition was equally, if less dramatically, fluid.) A curious letter in a contemporary Bengali journal by a number of people from this area highlights the need for a firmer social organisation for the high caste Bengali Hindus of the area.<sup>58</sup> In contemporary parlance certain parts of this area were still literally the old “hamlets” or “villages” where the old family houses were situated. A physical setting of undoubted fluidity tended to heighten psychological resistance to the melting-pot—a resistance offered by the low-rank

<sup>57</sup> Street names indicated on Schalch's Plan of the City of Calcutta (1825) are significant in this connection. *The New Calcutta Directory* (1856), pt. IX, pp. 7 201, gives the names and occupations of residents or indicates types or groups as in “Huts occupied by the Portuguese” (undoubtedly poor Catholic “Christians of Colour”).

<sup>58</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Samachar Darpan*, August 5, 1837, in B. N. Bandopadhyay (ed.), *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*, 1949, vol. 2, p. 274.

European or Eurasian<sup>59</sup> as much as the high or middle caste Bengali. This apparently mental phenomenon tended in its turn to influence the physical setting in creating island-like or shell-like formations.

In the north of Calcutta the forces of coalescence and segregation were working towards the steady growth of the bazar and the steady Bengali withdrawal under a vague impulse to live within a physical framework with some recognisable features—a zone for riverine trade or grain merchants, zones for braziers, potters and Muslim tailors, residential clusters interspersed with spice shops, mustard oil and coconut oil manufactories, temples, jungles, ruined houses and huts.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Griffin (pseud.), *Sketches of Calcutta*, 1841, pp. 69-71, 110-14. See also Chapter II, section III.

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix V—"Some Representative Bengali Neighbourhoods".

## CHAPTER II

# The City as a Mosaic— Ethnicity and Occupations in Calcutta

The autochthons of the swamps of Calcutta have left little documentary evidence. From the land measurement records (*chithas*) of 1793 relating to the 55 villages immediately outside the town limit of Calcutta in the late 18th century, we may get a vague picture of an agricultural and fishing population composed predominantly of local fishing and agricultural castes (Bagdis, Pods, Tiors) and Muhammadans (tending to have a Bengali first name followed by the suffix Mochalman, [phonetic Bengali spelling of Mussulman, an indication of lower economic and social status]).<sup>1</sup> Both in the land measurement records and in the revenue records of the 1770s and 1780s Muslim and Hindu names ending with Mondols (headmen, owner-cultivators, etc.) occur, indicating a higher economic status among those communities.

Among these Mondols were people who could probably take particular advantage of the expansion of the rice and fish market in the early stages of the growth of Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> The improved economic position of a section of the original population might have been a factor in the split within the caste of Pods at a later stage of social development.<sup>3</sup> While

<sup>1</sup> Old Revenue Records in the Collectorate of Alipur, Calcutta, e.g. *Chithas* of Mouza Bagmari and Mouza Kankurgacha in *dih* Ultadingi, 1793.

<sup>2</sup> Among the earliest settlers in Calcutta were the Mondols from Baruipur, historically a flourishing mart near Calcutta. See A. K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, Census of India, 1901, p. 14. In some southern localities in Calcutta, including my own, the Mondols are the earliest settlers.

<sup>3</sup> B. Solvyns, *Les Hindous*, 1808, vol. I, Twelfth no., plate 2. Even in the late 18th century Solvyns, the Flemish artist-observer of the society in and around Calcutta, noticed a tendency towards upward social mobility

some fragments of evidence are available on the agricultural and fishing population, none can be expected on the falconers, snake-catchers and similar groups still hanging on to the remaining wild fringes of Calcutta.

The city, however, bore hard on its original population, squeezing them out to the fringes where the city's garbage provided some kind of sustenance to the descendants of autochthons. On the whole, the city's economy tended to reject them. In the most prominent labouring group in Calcutta in the 18th century, the palanquin-bearers—the local carriers of the Bagdi caste—were rated to be the least acceptable and therefore least significant.<sup>4</sup> Rare references may be found to the occupations of the original population in 18th century court documents. A court document of 1778 runs thus: “there being no business ready but some bills for misdemeanours, that is four indictments for perjury and about twenty for nuisances in burning shells within the town for making lime, called here chunum and in keeping shells with the stinking fish in them”.<sup>5</sup>

Some original street names such as Chunapukur and Chuna Guly probably indicate the location of lime industries. Evidence of salt works at least on the fringes of the late 18th and early 19th century Calcutta is available from different sources.<sup>6</sup> The salt workers, one of the most oppressed occupational groups of the late 18th century, have probably left their stamp on the name of an area in the heart of old Calcutta, namely Malanga (the salt workers were called *malangis*).

Situated at a relatively high level of ground on the river

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among the Pods, especially in relation to Bagdis. The split among the Pods is indicated by census reports of the late 19th and early 20th century.

<sup>4</sup> B. Solvyns, *Les Hindous*, vol. I, section I, “Hindoo Castes and Professions”.

<sup>5</sup> Hyde Notes, vol. 8, Tuesday, December 15, 1778.

<sup>6</sup> “The salt water lake [on the fringe of Calcutta] is surrounded by salt makers and they make a lack [lakh] *maunds* [37 kg] annually there. . . .” C. A. Nicholls, “Field Book of Survey of a Part of Calcutta” (manuscript), 1809. Scattered references are available in the Proceedings of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue (1773-1785).

bank and near what was probably the old channel of the river were villages with local administrative, market and sacred functions, having no recorded history. Family histories and traditions converge to accord a central importance to the historically hazy process of the organisation of a new order following the end of the Afghan rule and the defeat of the zamindar hero of the Bengal delta, Raja Pratapaditya, at the hands of the Mughal General, Man Singh. The Brahmin family of the Sabarna Choudhuris, whose founder had been, according to family history, a revenue officer under Pratapaditya, switched its support to the Mughals and acquired a large part of the territory of Calcutta and was supposed to have patronised the priestly family of the Kali temple and other Brahmins who got rent-free land in what was to develop as Calcutta proper in the early 18th century.<sup>7</sup> Close to the zamindari of the Sabarna Choudhuris were the holdings of one of the greatest landed families of Bengal—the Nadia Rajas.<sup>8</sup> Extensive references to rent-free holdings of land for Brahmins (*brahmottar*) occur in 18th century documents on Calcutta and the contiguous southern villages.<sup>9</sup> But despite Brahminical and high-caste land holding and its situation within the legendary sacred triangle, the region of Calcutta was relatively isolated from the principal cultural zones of Bengal. Even the “ancient” village of Gobindapur was a riparian settlement oriented to trade and could not have high respectability for the more orthodox. The temple of Kali could inspire all the greater awe if

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of traditions and stories about the Sabarna Choudhuris, see A. K. Ray, op. cit. pp. 9-11. The genealogical works from which Ray summarises the materials (*Sambandhanirnaya* and *Kalikhetradiwipika*) indicate perhaps a substratum of truth or a certain direction of history rather than facts in the orthodox sense. The prominence of the family in the Calcutta region is indicated by revenue documents cited in Ray's work and also by scattered references in the records of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, e.g. “Ancient Choudhries and Talookdars”, Fort William, October 3, 1777.

<sup>8</sup> Reference to two Parganas, Shapur and Ekdalia, in *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, 1785-1788, vol. 7, p. 285.

<sup>9</sup> “Survey of Company Lands” in C. R. Wilson, *Early Annals*, vol. 1, pp. 284-86. The *Chithas* of 1793 also indicate Brahmin-held plots of land very likely to have been obtained from earlier zamindars.

situated on a deserted spot or ideally in the midst of a jungle. Even in the land of swamps that was Bengal, the region of Calcutta could well have been known as *Buruniyar Desh* or the low country.

The earliest group of adventurers in the region were, by tradition and story, those people who made a profession of "catching a captain", which has passed into a Bengali proverb meaning that one has got hold of the right person for personal advancement. This could well have been the earliest occupation in Calcutta, next to fishing and tilling the soil. Even the Setts and Basaks—the leading merchants in early 18th century Calcutta—had to do some kind of "captain catching", though they might increasingly have developed a monopoly in the supply of textiles. The profession of the ship captains' banian proliferated into the complex network of baniandom during the late 18th and early 19th century with the expansion of European interests. This "ancient" profession could still be at the root of the largest self-made fortunes at the end of the 18th century.<sup>10</sup> And in the *New Calcutta Directory* of 1856, the ship captains' banian still holds a prominent place.<sup>11</sup>

In the second half of the 18th century, baniandom reached its most complex level of development. The typical banian was no doubt a kind of broker or agent, a species which became as thick as locusts on a lush pasture as is evident from the judicial records of the late 18th century. Some men of ability could, however, rise above the level of mere intermediaries, though they maintained for its advantage a link with powerful Englishmen as agents.<sup>12</sup> As the 19th century

<sup>10</sup> Grish Ghosh, *Ramdoolol De—the Bengali Millionaire*, Calcutta, 1869, p. 28. Also MCSCR, *Ramnarain Ghose vs. James Calder, Ramdhone Ghose and others*, October 19, 1829. Ramdulal's business is described in one of the depositions as consisting "in managing the concerns of captains and supercargoes of vessels which resorted to Calcutta and of disposing of their cargoes and in procuring for them. . . ." The Account Current attached to the inventory of his properties (O.W. 10402) mentions premium on 60 chests of opium shipped to Singapore, charges on landing gold and silver, etc.

<sup>11</sup> *The New Calcutta Directory*, 1856, pp. 121, 141.

<sup>12</sup> P. J. Marshall, "Private Investment in 18th Century Bengal", *Bengal, Past and Present*, Diamond Jubilee Number, 1967.

advanced and the great patriarchal European merchants like John Palmer made way before the crash, the great patriarchal banians, too, began to disappear.<sup>13</sup>

In comparison with the banians, who were basically intermediaries in trade, the *dewans*, intermediaries in judicial and revenue administration, were a smaller and a much less complex group, though the two words were often used interchangeably, some individuals combining the functions of both the banian and the *dewan*. Generally, however, the phenomenon of the *dewan* was less urban than that of the *banian*. In the early days of the Company's administration when the company specially needed native expertise in revenue and judicial matters, quite a number of such "experts" were recruited at a local level, though some found their way into Calcutta like the redoubtable Dewan Ganga Gobinda Singh (Sinha).<sup>14</sup> The days of the great *dewans* passed much earlier than those of the great banians. By the end of the 18th century, however, the banians and *dewans* had combined to give a definite shape to Calcutta's comprador elite as the topmost layer in the "native" economic community in the city and as a more or less homogeneous group, consisting predominantly of families of fortune-makers.

## II

The distribution of the opulent comprador groups over the physical space of the city was a significant element in what may be called the social ecology of the city for want of a better term. These comprador families, exclusively Hindu, and almost entirely Bengali (except for one north-Indian Khatri family) tended to be concentrated in the northern

<sup>13</sup> "John Palmer", obituary notice in *Samachar Darpan*; B. N. Bandyopadhyay (ed.), *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*, 1949, vol. 2, pp. 341-42, *The National Magazine*, January 1897, pp. 154-55; Grish Ghosh, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter III, section VI, of this book.



division of the city.<sup>15</sup> The distribution of these families abruptly stops at the second main axis of the intermediate town—the Dharamtala Street—starting from which, through the rear of the European town, there is a high degree of concentration of Muslim occupational groups, *khansamas* or table servants, *ostagars* or tailors, with a sprinkling of *vakils* (lawyers) or *munsis* (learned scribes). The two sectors contrast sharply on the economic scale. The poverty of the south-eastern part of the intermediate town is perhaps expressed in the variation in the usage of the term zamindar or landowner. The zamindar in the northern division was primarily an urban and rural real estate owner on a scale set by the comprador elite while in the south the scale would tend to be set by the table servants, tailors, boatswains, book-binders, butchers and other kinds of servitors to the European community. Muslim landownership was indeed a strikingly noticeable feature in the intermediate zone of the city and the city's immediate suburbs. Even in the northern zone, the comprador-dominated Indian town, Muslims owned significant blocks of real estate, mainly on the eastern fringes, in the mid-19th century. The pattern of ownership is very similar to the pattern in the intermediate zone, except that people from the learned professions are fewer than in the south.<sup>16</sup>

Spatially, the upper and middle levels of the Muslim community tended to be dispersed over two sectors of the intermediate town, the north-west and the south-east, and the outlying parts of the Indian town. Muslim aristocracy, so far as it existed in Calcutta, lacked a spatial cohesion

<sup>15</sup> A list of such families with associated localities occurs in L. N. Ghose, *The Modern History of Indian Chiefs, Rajas and Zamindars*, pt II. Also see B. N. Bandopadhyay (ed.), op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 753-56.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix VI—"Some Predominantly Muslim Areas" for some representative Muslim occupations and distribution of some Muslim groups. Abdullah in *Tarikh-i-Kalkata* (1930)—an Urdu book on the history of Calcutta from the Muslim point of view—cites a dictum current among the Muslims of Calcutta, referring, ironically, to the "aristocracy of butchers and table servants". In Simm's Survey Map of Calcutta (1847-1849) the vast slum complex—the largest such concentration in the map—has been traditionally a Muslim inhabited area (Kalabagan Bustee around Basak Dighee).

similar to that possessed by the rising Bengali Hindu landed aristocracy in the north. The Nawab of Chitpore and the exiled descendants of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, were located at the two opposite ends of the city. The Muslim mercantile aristocracy did have a focus but that was in the highly mixed and extremely cosmopolitan north-western sector of the city—a sector which stood for certain distinct functions and cultural traits much removed from the functional and cultural character of the other Muslim areas in the city.

To a considerable extent, the character of the north-western sector of the intermediate town was determined by a cosmopolitan merchant community—Persian, Arab, Parsi, Armenian, Jewish, Greek and Gujarati—most of them traditionally living in close proximity in many other cities of Asia and of the old Mediterranean world (except for Gujaratis in the latter case) and moving away from old centres and converging on the new. The ethnicity of this area might have, to a significant extent, been a repetition of the pattern of a segment of Surat and Hooghly and to some extent of Dacca and Murshidabad. The net of Asian trade periodically shifted a little and readjusted itself but the people who held the net together changed very little in terms of ethnic groups.<sup>17</sup>

A striking feature of this cosmopolitan sector of Calcutta is a high degree of development of Portuguese, Armenian, Jewish, Greek and Parsi religious and philanthropic institutions. The Portuguese and Armenian churches were the oldest, but by the mid-19th century the Portuguese community was not easily distinguishable from the Catholic community in general. The presence of an identifiable Portuguese element in the earliest stage of the city's growth is linked with many stories and traditions about old Calcutta. The ancestor of the famous early 19th century improviser of Bengali verse (*kabiwal*)—Anthony Feringhee—was said to have been a Portuguese employee of the “an-

• <sup>17</sup> See Introduction for the argument about the continuity of the cosmopolitan business sector.

cient" zamindar of Calcutta. And the English, when they arrived, found a Portuguese Mass House beside the office (*cutchery*) of the zamindar.<sup>18</sup>

The origin of the Grand Mosque of the Muslims close to the cosmopolitan sector is obscure, but tradition claims for its site a pre-18th century origin, and it came significantly to be called the Naquda Mosque—the mosque for whose construction the western Indian and Arab ship captains and merchants probably made a substantial contribution. Such a striking sector in the city from the point of view of concentration of ethnic groups and of a certain type of institutional development suggests the historical continuity of a forceful urban tradition. A number of peripatetic groups of merchants had found a place for a sojourn, albeit a very long one.

The Armenian testamentary documents<sup>19</sup> of the late 18th and the early 19th century refer to the continuing movement from New Julpha in Ispahan (Persia) to Calcutta, though the Armenian population never exceeded 700 during the period. The movement of the Armenians between Bombay and Calcutta (and possibly Madras) cannot be adequately documented but a considerable degree of mobility from port to port up to the late 18th century appears quite likely, especially from the nature of their business transactions.

Long residence in the inland commercial towns of Bengal—Dacca and Murshidabad—imparted to this peripatetic merchant group a local colour. The Pogose family of Armanitola (Armenian quarter) in Dacca was reputed as zamindars.<sup>20</sup> This local colour was shared to some extent by the Greeks of Dacca. Pertrus Aratoon, an Armenian merchant and money-lender, in late 18th century Calcutta, also held landed properties in interior Bengal.<sup>21</sup> Some Armenians

<sup>18</sup> Stories about Anthony Feringhee still have a wide circulation and are partly recorded in near contemporary sources. See Bhabotosh Datta (ed.), *Kabi Jibani* and S. K. De, *History of Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta, 1919.

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix VII—"A Peddling Community—the Armenians"

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix VII—serial no VII.

<sup>21</sup> Petition from Coja Petrus Aratoon, Calcutta Committee of Revenue, Fort William, June 15, 1775.

definitely became familiar with the Bengali language and people like Mirza Pogose would appear as translators of the Bengali language into English in the late 18th century Calcutta court documents. Yet an Armenian testator could instruct his children to leave Calcutta and go anywhere outside India.<sup>22</sup> References to auction of properties in Armenian testamentary documents are very frequent in contrast with comparable Bengali documents. In the late 18th century Calcutta Armenians worked in close cooperation with Persian merchants—perhaps a continuation of the tradition of Surat and Hooghly. The link of the Persian-Armenian merchant community with Surat and Bombay and through these port cities with Bussrah on the Persian Gulf must have kept these communities close together at least in the 18th century.

Unlike the Armenians the Jews arrived quite late in the eastern part of India, and in Calcutta the first Jewish settler did not probably arrive from Aleppo (via Surat) before 1798. By 1816 there were perhaps fifty Jews in the city with two synagogues. The first Hebrew printing press in Calcutta was set up in 1841. The Jews of Calcutta were generally of Bagdadi origin and their migration was prompted by a series of revolutions in Bagdad which had weakened the position of Jewish financiers. These refugees arriving in Calcutta from the late 18th century onwards formed part of a string of trading posts stretching from Shanghai to London. The earliest immigrants continued the traditional trade in horses and precious stones with the various Persian Gulf ports and also started trading with the British in commodities such as wool and opium. In 1841, the *Bengal and Agra Guide* noted that the Jews of the upper class in Calcutta were not particularly rich, that the wealthiest lived in the Armenian Street area and that the retail dealers among them traded in rose water, horses, and Persian wares. The Arab (Iraqi) Jews of that class travelled all over India in the capacity of box-wallahs or pedlars. The *Guide* further noted that by the end of the 19th century the Jews had moved into a

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix VII—serial no. VIII.

range of other enterprises. Several were active on the stock exchange and many others as large urban landowners. The larger firms were essentially parallel to the European firms and similarly engaged in shipping jute for export and cloth for import. The Jews of Calcutta took a somewhat longer time than the Armenians and the Parsis in developing sophisticated company-type organisations.<sup>23</sup>

The ethnic character of the cosmopolitan zone of the intermediate town was to a large extent derived from the intense concentration of very small groups of people of diverse ethnic origins in an extremely limited area. These merchant groups continued the peddling tradition of maritime trade, though, by the mid-19th century, a number of Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Parsi families had moved towards the formation of a new firm-type of organisation such as the Greek firm of Ralli Brothers, the Armenian firm of Apar & Co. and the Parsi marine insurance companies.

The Persians, the premier merchant community in traditional Asian trade (as they sometimes saw themselves), however, held on to the peddling tradition and the aristocratic merchant status it conferred on some of them with their distinctive linguistic and cultural background. No testamentary document from any other group in the cosmopolitan sector exudes the confidence inherent in the Persian documents.<sup>24</sup> To some extent this may follow from the genius of the language. But the Persian merchant group, even as late as the mid-19th century, could well feel confident within a cosmopolitan Asiatic and semi-Asiatic community of merchants and a cultural administrative set-up dominated by the Persian language. For the greater part of the period from the mid-18th to the mid-19th century the cosmopolitanism of the intermediate town and of the contiguous segment of the Indian town was dominated at the

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Timberg, "The Jewish Community in Calcutta", *Bengal, Past and Present*, January-April, 1974. The Police census in 1837 puts the number of Jews in Calcutta at 360. For a recent work on the subject, see F. E. Cooper, and J. E. Cooper, *Jews of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1974.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix VIII—"The Mughal Community in Calcutta". The Police census in 1837 puts the number of Mughals (Turko-Persians) at 527.

CALCUTTA: POLICE CENSUS

Report in *Samachar Darpan*, 25th February, 1837, as reproduced  
in B. N. Bandopadhyay, *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*,  
Vol. 2, 1949, p. 652

1. English	.	..	3,138
2. East Indians	..	...	4,746
[Eurasians]			
3. Portuguese	.		3,181
[Possibly Roman Catholics attached to the Portuguese Church]			
4. French	.		160
5. Chinese	.		362
[mostly Cantonese]			
6. Armenians	..		636
7. Jews		360	307 (a)
8. Upcountry Muhammedans		16,677	} 59,622 (b)
9. Bengali Muhammedans		4,567	
10. Upcountry Hindus		17,333	} 1,56,735 (c)
11. Bengali Hindus	..	1,23,318	
12. Mughals		527	
13. Parsees	..		40
14. Arabs		351	
15. Maghs [Burmese]			683
16. Madrassi [South Indians]	...	55	
17. Indian Christians	.	..	104
18. Unspecified Lower orders		19,084	
			<hr/> 2,29,714 <hr/>

Items marked (a), (b) and (c) have been revised from A. K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, Census of India, 1901, vol. 7, p. 67. Ray, however, does not reproduce the break-up figures from the original but only gives the total number of Hindus and Muhammedans. He includes items 12 and 14 in the category 'Muhammedans'. Item 16 does not occur in his enumeration. Item 18 is likely to form part of the category 'Hindus'.

higher level by the Persian language and culture, while at the lower level, especially in the late 18th century, a kind of *paria* or pidgin Portuguese might have had general currency.<sup>25</sup> The process of Anglicisation of the Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Parsis in terms of the adoption of the English language and style of life was a slow process till the mid-19th century. The inventories of the personal effects of the Armenians and the Parsis from the late 18th century constitute evidence on the use of household objects, indicating a trend towards a European life style. It was not till the late 19th century that Anglicism became an established cultural phenomenon among the Armenians, Jews, Greeks and Parsis.

### III

Outside the small cosmopolitan sector of the intermediate town, the ethnic composition (taking the late 18th century as the starting-point) changed along with the economic and cultural preoccupations of the groups distributed over the space of the intermediate town. Numerically Muslim-dominated, the greater part of the intermediate town outside the cosmopolitan sector demonstrated from the late 18th century a complex ethnicity associated with various groups of the so-called Eurasians. The complexity of this ethnic phenomenon in the late 18th century is graphically described in the case notes of a Supreme Court Judge of Calcutta. The term he seeks to define is "Callah Feringhee"—a term which was no doubt widely current in 18th century Calcutta and came to be replaced in the early 19th century by "East Indian", "Eurasian" and still later by "Anglo-Indian".

Mr. Justice Hyde notes in connection with a lawsuit in 1777, which involved Eurasians: "The general term Portuguese was used [for] those who were rich, the descendants of proper Portuguese, natives of Portugal, who

<sup>25</sup> T. W. Clark, "The Languages of Calcutta", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1956, pp. 453-74.

were settled at Chittagong and on a conquest of them, many who were not killed nor could hide themselves at Chittagong were brought by the conqueror [the Mughals] and settled at Hooghly long before the English were settled in Bengal; for men descended from English and other European fathers and black mothers, even some who are Protestants; for men and women who ceased to be considered as Hindoos and Muhamedans because they live amongst Christians and eat and drink as they do and the women kept as concubines by Englishmen of which there are many, are most frequently called Portuguese especially if they conform to Christianity; Muslims, even though they are not Christians but many of them concubines of Englishmen, remain Muhamedans and Hindoos as they have been educated; the slaves employed by the English, the Portuguese and other Europeans are usually called Portuguese and considered as Christian, though not often Christianised but are called Christian mainly because they are made to eat all kinds of meat and to do such kind of business as neither Muhamedans nor Hindoos will do.”<sup>26</sup>

The elements which Mr. Justice Hyde identified in the composition of the so-called Callah (Black) Feringhee were probably also the bases of stratification within the Eurasian community. The levelling force of Catholicism brought together a motley community accommodating the lightest as well as the darkest of skin pigments and, combined with the casual Luso-Indian attitude towards race, tended to force diverse categories, “even some Protestants”, within one community. The tradition persisted but the search for the relative purity of blood and respectability of descent grew stronger with the years. A spokesman of the Anglo-Indian community, early in the present century, deeply regretted the fact that the children of former slaves, many of them Caffries or Africans, had found their way into the Anglo-Indian community.<sup>27</sup> The *kintalis*, as they were called, lived

<sup>26</sup> Hyde Notes, vol. 7, 1777. [This reference could not be rechecked because of the brittle condition of the volume.—Author]

<sup>27</sup> H. A. Stark, *Calcutta in Slavery Days*, Calcutta, 1917, p. 9.



in miserable poverty and promiscuity in slums, probably with a characteristic physical lay-out, from which the term *kintal* might have been derived.

Testamentary documents relating to the Eurasian community are much more frequently available than similar records for any other Indian community.<sup>28</sup> Many of these documents are left by women with landed and house properties of modest proportions in Calcutta and its immediate neighbourhood. These properties are likely to have been derived from their long and often sincere association with European sojourners in Calcutta, ranging from a governor of Bengal to a humble private in the army of the East India Company. Many of these women retained till their death their association with their original castes or communities while their children had English or European names and entered firmly into the institution of wedlock, the irrelevance of which for the 18th and early 19th century was not always understood in the more respectable late 19th or early 20th century. The force of Anglo-Saxon Protestant ethics probably proved stronger than Latin laxity or ecumenical openness. A description of the Anglo-Indian community in the early forties of the 19th century indicates a degree of exclusiveness in the upper strata of the community.

"The East Indian Sahibs", comments a European observer, "do not, rather will not, form matrimonial alliances among the native sisterhood, the very idea of such an event occurring is utterly repugnant to them, hence from being almost completely deprived of opportunities for forming conjugal relationships with European young ladies, and from their irreparable aversion to form them with the natives, the members of the East Indian community will remain but slightly connected by marriage ties with Europeans. And, therefore, they will for many years occupy an isolated position as to domestic circumstances, not able in general to rise higher in society, and absolutely determined that as far as marriage is a cause, they will not sink lower in social respectability."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See Appendix IX—"Eurasians as an Ethnic Group in Calcutta".

<sup>29</sup> Griffin (pseud.), *Sketches of Calcutta*, Glasgow, 1843, p. 113.

The above comments of the social observer will naturally apply to the Eurasian or East Indian elite. Its search for social respectability was hampered by the circumstances described by the European observer. "If a European lady were to marry an East Indian, she would lose caste among her acquaintances and be discarded by them, though his wealth would enable her to sparkle with diamonds. . . . European bachelors are not always as inflexible as European ladies towards the East Indians, some of them have condescended to marry East Indian females who had heavy purses and a few have condescended to marry those who have light ones but in both cases these alliances may be regarded as marriages of convenience."<sup>30</sup>

In summing up the racial situation the commentator observes, "The European and native populations are, as is well known, the antipodes to each other in many important circumstances and the East Indians may be considered as occupying an intermediate, some may say, a central position between them, the latter are joined to Europeans and natives by ties of consanguinity and again, they are connected by personal interests much closer to the former than to the latter and also by a greater similarity in tastes, complexion and prospects."<sup>31</sup>

In the field of occupations, the Eurasian youths probably tended to have a strong preference for the clerical profession. As our social observer notes, "their fathers were clerks or 'writers' as they styled themselves, and they must be 'writers' also. Rather than acquire a practical knowledge of a trade the great majority of East Indian youths in the city prefer being clerks, they will rather toil for a small emolument as section writers in Government offices [copying clerks who transcribe government documents at so much per thousand words]. . . ."<sup>32</sup>

The Eurasian clerks appear to have had a distinct advantage over Bengali clerks till the early forties. While the wages

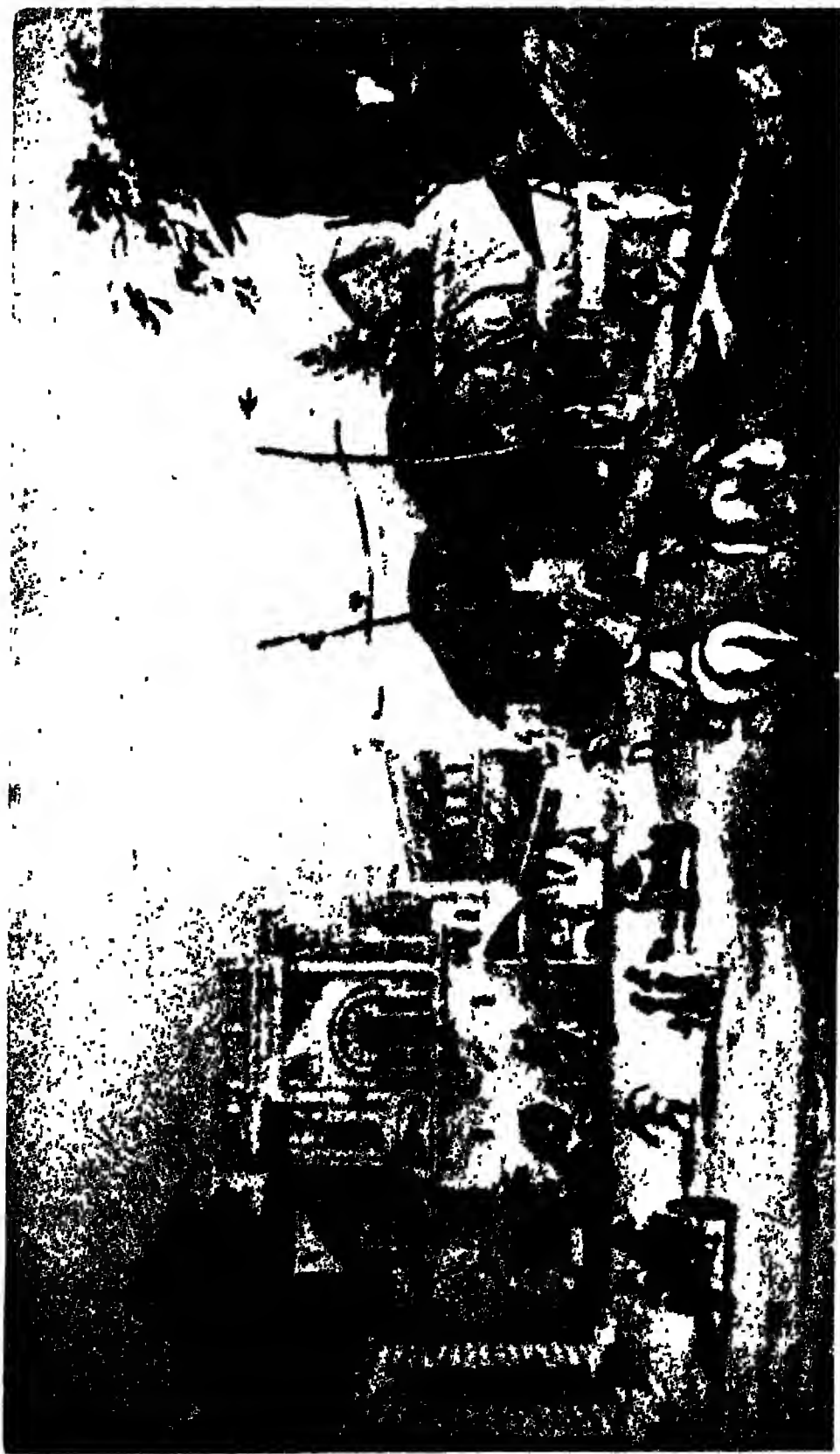
• <sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-11.

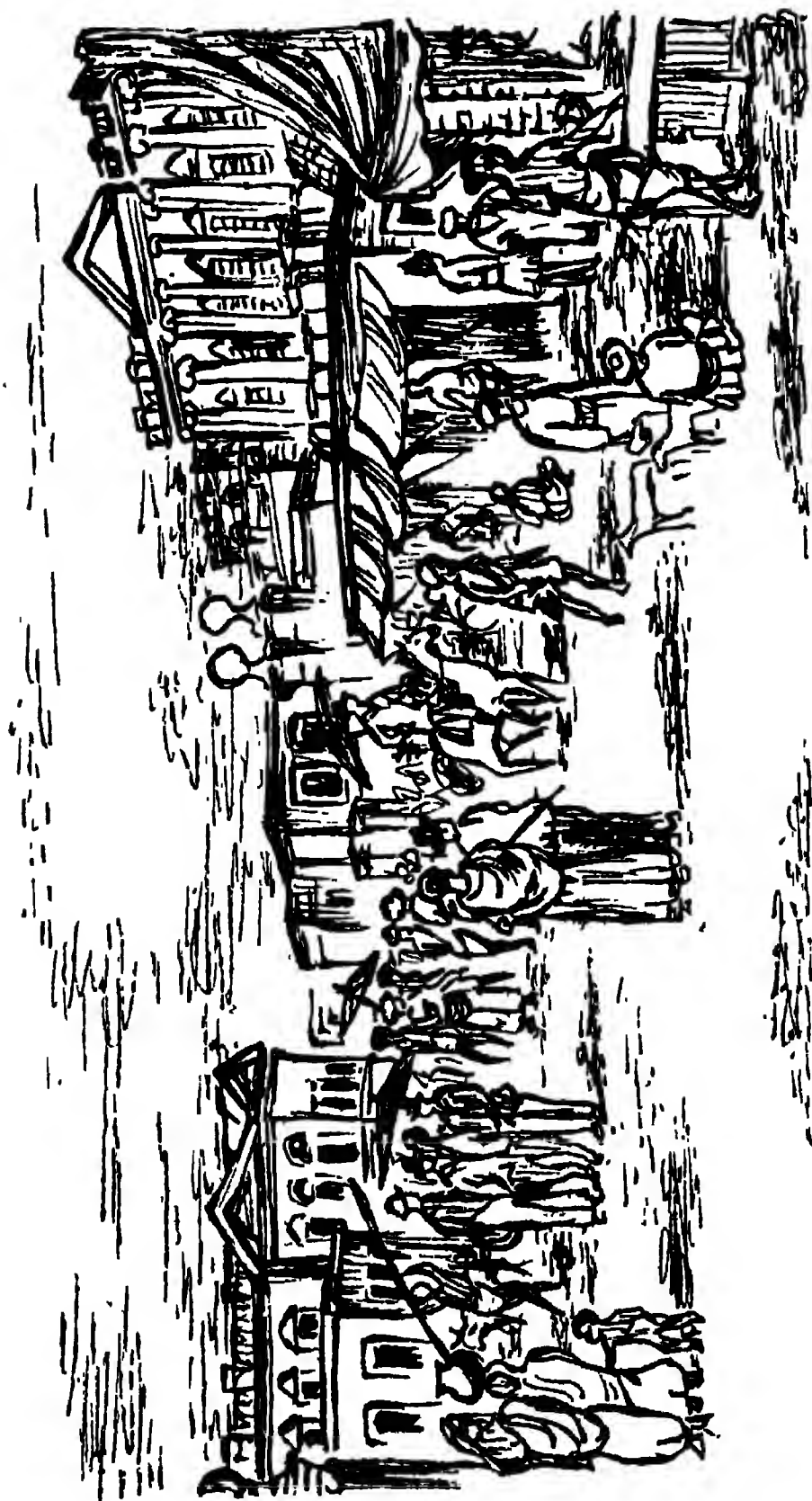
<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 114.



Different nations in Calcutta. From Solvyns' *Les Hindous*, 1811, Tome 3, Pl 5.



A mixed area bordering on the European town. The two riders in the foreground are a European and a Mughal (?). From "View in Clive Street" by Sir Charles D'oyly (1848).



Varieties of people and activity on the borderline between the European and the intermediate town From Solvyns' *Les Hindous*, 1811.

of the Bengali clerks varied between four and twenty rupees a month, those of the East Indians ranged from sixty to one hundred rupees in commercial houses.<sup>33</sup> The situation was likely to have changed rapidly since the early forties as English-educated Bengalis began to come out of Anglo-Bengali schools and colleges in increasing numbers. Certain other occupations, especially related to the railways and new types of workshops, became almost earmarked for Anglo-Indians. *The New Calcutta Directory* of 1856 produces substantial evidence on the occupational pattern in Eurasian or Anglo-Indian localities. A shift away from white collar jobs on the part of residents of Anglo-Indian neighbourhoods was already noticeable in the middle of the 19th century. This was probably at the cost of the intellectual and literary promise of a section of the Eurasian community in the early 19th century. The greatest teacher of the Bengali youth in the late twenties was a Eurasian—the neo-Kantian poet H. L. V. Derozio. Some of the earliest English seminaries in Calcutta were dominated by Eurasian teachers who imparted elementary English instruction to a number of budding personalities of the so-called Bengal renaissance.

Living in close neighbourhood to Eurasians of higher and middle status were Europeans of lower economic status. A ready job that awaited the destitute Britisher was that of a preventive officer of the Calcutta customs—a job to which the Anglo-Indians too were increasingly recruited.

A European observer other than the one quoted in connection with the Eurasians or Anglo-Indians thus writes about what he considers to be an average poorer European.

“Mr. Harrison, or as his familiars call him, and as he prefers being called, Tom Harrison, is an Englishman bred and born, a circumstance in which he glories—moreover he is a cockney—a circumstance of which he is by no means ashamed. His father, according to Tom’s own account, was and as Tom hopes is, a highly respectable tradesman, an iron monger in the city who managed to obtain for his son a

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

better education than he himself was blest withal. At a suitable age, Tom was bound prentice to the genteel profession of a silk mercer and haberdasher; his father giving with him, as Tom proudly declares, a 'prentice-fee of ninety pounds. Having, however, a soul above buttons and not liking confinement, Tom, when half his term was run, cut the counter and went to sea 'before the mast'. Here he was likely to do well enough but his ship was lost on one of the Cannibal Islands, most of his ship-mates killed and eaten by the natives and Tom, after many dangers and suffering, found himself penniless and piceless in Calcutta. Here that *omnium gatherum*, that Refuge for the Destitute—the preventive service, opened its friendly arms to receive him. Tom without friends or money, was fain to throw himself into them; and therein he will remain till some more attractive offer lures him from their embrace. He is now in the third grade, and on the receipt of Co's Rs. 150/- per mensem, better off in a pecuniary way than ever he was in his life; pretty comfortable in other respects, too, but rather inclined to grumble at the confinement. He is in the third grade, as I observed before. It has taken him four years, unexceptionable officer as he is, to attain that elevation; four years more, if he is steady and has luck, may bring him to the first grade."<sup>34</sup>

Despite the prominence of Eurasians and poorer Europeans in the central sector of the intermediate town along the Bowbazar Street axis,<sup>35</sup> the ethnicity of the zone is rendered highly complex by the presence of the organisational and occupational patterns of the Indian town. The presence of a Chinese community close to the axis represented an interesting ethnic twist because of the highly insulated nature of the China town.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> John Mawson, *A Few Local Sketches*, Calcutta, 1846, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> See Maps I and II, on pp. 10 and 12.

<sup>36</sup> The Chinese formed a highly insulated community in Calcutta as far back as 1780. "A number of Chinese having settled in Calcutta, who, tho' in general sober and industrious, yet when intoxicated commit violent outrages, particularly against each other and as thro' the difficulty of procuring an interpreter it is almost impossible to ascertain who are the

IV

A striking feature of the ethnicity of the Eurasian-dominated central zone of the intermediate town is the capability of the Eurasian ethnic group in the late 18th and the early 19th century to drive wedges into the neighbouring Indian town. The eastern part of the Bowbazar Street had the peculiar position of belonging to the eastern fringes of Sutanuti—Bazar Calcutta area, the Indian town proper, and commanding a vital nodal point which was part of the organisational set-up of the Indian town. The expansion of the European and Eurasian ethnic groups along the main line of force of the intermediate town—the avenue to the eastward of the mid-18th century—impinged forcefully on the vitally important fringe of the Indian town, leading to the establishment of a Catholic church and growth of localities with Christian-European names, close to the great Bengali mart for provisions—the Bytakkhana Bazar of the early 19th century. By mid-19th century European and Eurasian street names are oddly mixed up with Bengali names such as Chootarpara (area for carpenters), Syakrapara (area for goldsmiths), Jaloopara (probably an area for Muslim weavers), Bostompara (not actually indicated as such in maps and directories but probably implicit in the occupational and cultural pursuit of its inhabitants—the casteless Baisnabs).<sup>37</sup>

delinquents . . . we humbly propose that one of the most respectable among them be appointed chief or captain, who shall have certain authority over the rest. . . . A man named Amu who superintends the rum works of Mr. Somber—and who speaks English appears to be the most proper person. . . ." Police Office, April 7, 1788. Public Dept. Records, Government of India. For a description of the Chinese community in Calcutta, especially shoe-makers and leather merchants from Canton, see "The Chinese Colony in Calcutta", *Calcutta Review*, December, 1858, pp. 368-84.

<sup>37</sup> *The New Calcutta Directory*, pt. IX, p. 82. For Bostompara we may depend on a still prevalent tradition of the locality and a High Court document that substantiates the tradition for the mid-19th century—"Will of Luckey Priya Bustomy of Arpooley in Calcutta". She had a house in Haurcattah Lane in Arpooley. The recipients of her property were some Baisnabis of Arpooley, some Bairagis of the area and a Baisnab priest of Simla in Calcutta. Will Register, 1827, HCOS, p. 126.



A small-scale manufacturing and industrial bias is noticeable in the names of the Bengali localities and the occupations of the people. Comb-making, brush-making, watch-repairing are described as some of the occupations of the people in the streets close to the Bowbazar Street axis.<sup>38</sup> The bazar, on the other hand, had a relatively transient effect on the ethnic and community composition of the people of the area which still retained in the mid-19th century some of the features of the periphery of the Indian town. The transient element might be a reflection of a bazar organisation with a heavy retail and local bias.

An entrenched bazar community is, however, the primary feature of the great Bazar—the central wholesale market—the historic nucleus of the Indian town from which the “Black Merchants”, especially the Setts and Basaks, the merchant-weavers of Calcutta, and the Bengali gold merchants, operated from the early 18th century. The Burrabazar proper, or the Chowk, was called after the name of an Agarwal banker from Benaras, Monhor Das, whose name occurs in connection with money-lending transactions with the Company’s government.<sup>39</sup> Scattered references to north-Indian Khatri and Agarwals and Marwari Oswals occur in the late 18th and early 19th century records of Calcutta. Both Oswals and Khatri had long been prominent in the mercantile population of the two premier cities of Bengal before Calcutta overshadowed them. The Khatri are substantially represented among the merchant groups enumerated in early 19th century Dacca.<sup>40</sup> And at least one of the 18th century family founders in Calcutta was a Khatri—a resident of Burrabazar.<sup>41</sup> The great 18th century banking house of the Jagat

<sup>38</sup> *The New Calcutta Directory*, pt. IX, Okhil Mistry’s Lane, p. 124.

<sup>39</sup> Letter dated May 9, 1797; Gopal Doss Monhor Doss, bankers, to supply money to Bombay Govt., *Fort William India House Correspondence*, vol. 13 (1796-1800). Monhor Das chowk is marked prominently on Schalch’s Map of Calcutta (1825) Also see N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III, pp. 79-81, for further information on Monhor Das.

<sup>40</sup> Census of India, 1961, Report on the Population Estimates of India, 1820-1830, p. 294.

<sup>41</sup> L. N. Ghose, op. cit., p. 41. Dewan Kasinath made extensive land purchases from Hoozoorimall. His descendants were known as Burmans.

Seths was based on Murshidabad and had a *kuthi* or office in Calcutta.<sup>42</sup> So had the Dugars, another Oswal house of bankers.

By the 19th century the names of the *pattis* as distinguished from the *paras* with purely Bengali association had begun to acquire prominence in the Burrabazar area. Burrabazar, however, was hardly confined to the *chowk*. Among the *pattis* that were forming outside the *chowk* was *Pagya-patty* where a conference of Marwari bankers was reported in 1827.<sup>43</sup> It appears from a report in the *Calcutta Gazette* of that year that north Indian bankers were a highly organised community in Calcutta.<sup>44</sup> Though all of them could not be Marwaris (a generic term for people from present Rajasthan and a specific term for people from Jodhpur-Marwar region), they are very likely to have been predominant in view of their background and future prominence. A Bengali journal of the same period also refers to Marwari Mahajans (bankers) as a distinct community.<sup>45</sup> There was likely to have been some confusion between the north Indian (Hindustani shroff) bankers and their Marwari counterparts in the Bengali mind. However, the unmistakable prominence of the turbaned type as distinguished from the bare-headed type is borne out by the early 19th century drawings of Burrabazar by a British artist.<sup>46</sup> The Rev. James Long, the most perci-

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The *Calcutta Gazette* reports that when Kasinath Babu died in 1792, he was worth upwards of sixty lakhs *Selections from the Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 2, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> In the goods of Moolchaund Arorah (1828), Will no. O.W. 11181 both in Bengali and Nagree "I am residing in quarters in the Bazar on the south Poostah in Mur Bahur's ghat in the town of Calcutta and I have one shop on the land of Srijoot Juggut Sait Sahib inhabitant of Burnah Bazar wherein I deal in Gotah and Pattah and Beneres Zaree Staffs, etc. of various descriptions and Europe cloth and so foith. . . ." Witnesses: Gungaram Daroka Doss, Kissensing Jantadar (inhabitants of Posta)

<sup>43</sup> N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III, pp. 84-85.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Samachar Chundrika*, quoted in *Samachar Darpan*, March 24, 1827 in B. N. Bandopadhyay (ed.), op cit, vol. I, pp. 166-67

<sup>46</sup> "Head study in Burrabazar", in Colesworthy Grant, *An Anglo-Indian Domestic Sketch*, 1850. Also "A Street in Burrabazar" in R. Jump, *Views in Calcutta*, 1837. See sketch-reproductions in this book.



A street in the Burrabazar area. A dwarf is in the foreground. Behind him traders are conferring with one another. A prostitute is smoking a hookah.  
From Jump's *Views in Calcutta* (1837).

pient sociologist of Calcutta, described Burrabazar of the mid-century as distinguished by the presence of the Marwaris.<sup>47</sup> Speaking in 1872 at a literary society in Burrabazar, he specifically drew attention to the study of the Marwari and Mughal (Persian) part of Calcutta.<sup>48</sup>

Actually, Burrabazar was a vast and interlocking series of business zones having some features distinct from the Chinabazar or the Cossitola business area of the intermediate town which tended to lean towards the European town. The cosmopolitan sector of the intermediate town which interpenetrated with these bazars and business areas had a maritime bias which clearly distinguished it from Burrabazar.<sup>49</sup> Logically, the Gujaratis would tend to live in the cosmopolitan sector while Marwaris would tend to gravitate across the line, which was almost actually the case.

Among the links between the two groups of interlocking bazars the Bengali trading castes were particularly significant. Both in the Chinabazar zone and in the Chowk and some other parts of Burrabazar the number and variety of gold-merchant and other Bengali trading caste establishments testify to the persistence of the business tradition of the local community continuing apparently as an obscure stream by the side of the cascade of Bengali comprador activity.<sup>50</sup> The Bengali mercantile community had, however, lost by 1830 its main prop, namely specialisation in cotton piecegoods. In the new specialisations the Bengali trading communities were losing ground, especially in the distribution of Manchester goods and later on, in the stock and

<sup>47</sup> [James Long], "Calcutta in the Olden Time—Its People", *Calcutta Review*, 1860, vol 35, p 224

<sup>48</sup> See Introduction

<sup>49</sup> *The New Calcutta Directory*, pt. IX. Aga Kurbala Mahomed's St, p. 7; Amratolla St., pp. 8, 9; Armenian St., p. 10 are examples in the mid-19th century of concentration of merchants connected with coastal and Persian Gulf trade. Cotton St would be primarily associated with internal trade, the Marwari lodgings were quite prominently concentrated there (pp. 48-49).

<sup>50</sup> *The New Calcutta Directory*, pt. IX, sections on New Chinabazar (pp. 120-21), and Burrabazar (pp. 24-26).

speculative jute market.<sup>51</sup> The new Marwari arrivals were increasingly forming their own island worlds in Calcutta. The Oswals and Khattris of the earlier period—especially the Oswals of Murshidabad and the Khattris of Dacca—had almost been assimilated into Bengali culture, though not wholly in the Bengali social set-up. But Burrabazar offered the new arrivals an island world where they could insulate themselves from the local society and culture, accentuating the plurality of the urban society and the ethnic variety of the city. As early as 1830 a Bengali journal focuses attention on the conflict of economic interests of the Bengali and Marwari bankers.<sup>52</sup> Yet a significant number of Bengali commercial castes continued to trace their origins to north or western Indian sources in their caste histories reflecting their self-image.<sup>53</sup>

The obscurity of the Marwari presence in early 19th century Calcutta contrasts sharply with the resonant activity of the Bengali comprador families in the city and the flourishing style of some of the Bengali gold-merchant families right within or on the periphery of Burrabazar. Actually, the Bengali comprador and merchant families were increasingly investing in urban and rural real estate, a trend shared to some extent by groups of Oswals and Khattris with deeper roots in the Bengali soil than the comparatively new arrivals from Rajasthan and north India. In the macro-Indian bazar zone the Marwaris, living by themselves in obscure lodgings far away from Jodhpur, Jaipur or Jaisalmer, or operating

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Timberg, "A Note on the Arrival of Marwaris", *Bengal, Past and Present*, January-June, 1971. From about the mid-19th century documents of the High Court would tend to have scattered information about Marwari business operations covering a wide area of Bengal from Burrabazar Cf. Suit no. 423, of 1862: *Sikurchund of Moorshidabad and Gourangpursud of Rangpur, merchants trading under the name and style of Sikurchund Gourangpursud at No. 14 Kansaraputty in Burrabazar, vs. Soorujmull Mookunchunde, merchants of No. 25 Puggypetty in Burrabazar* . . . Breach of contract: delivery of ten bales of grey long cloth [imported] to the plaintiff. See also Postscript II.

<sup>52</sup> See fn. 45 above, excerpt from *Samachar Chandrika*.

<sup>53</sup> One significant example is that of the Setts and Basaks; see Dilip Basu, "The Banians and the British", in *Bengal, Past and Present*, January-June, 1971, pp. 30-45.

through their trusted *munims* (clerks), were retaining a sound hold on inter-regional money circulation and the flow of imported cloth and spices.<sup>54</sup> Such a long-distance interlocking network provided a cushioning system in an overall situation of highly constricted supply of capital to which the Bengalis never seriously addressed themselves except in a strictly local setting.

## V

The partial withdrawal of the Bengalis from the macro-Indian bazar zone—a very slow process in any case—was a manifestation of weakness in the long run, but from another angle as a socio-historical process related to more immediate realities, it might be regarded as a withdrawal in favour of a more immediately meaningful urban framework.

The growth of caste-based localities was probably the first step towards the evolution of such a framework. The traditional nomenclature of localities in the early 19th century is exclusively Bengali including Armanitola which is reminiscent of a locality bearing the same name in the older city of Dacca. Most of the caste-based localities had by the mid-19th century yielded to urban diversity. But the original base was, nevertheless, an element in the complex organisation of the Bengali localities.

The growth of an urban framework based primarily on the local tradition is evidenced by such names as Charakadanga (ground for hook-swinging and the associated fair), Rathtala (a place where the divine chariot was kept and a fair held), Gosainpara (a locality for Baisnab-Brahmin priests), Kansari-para (a locality for braziers), Darjipara (a locality for Muslim tailors) and so on. The transformation of compradors into urban and rural rentiers provided the chief motive force behind the organisation of Bengali localities in the early 19th century. The rentiers-turned-aristocrats provided localities

• <sup>54</sup> Thomas Timberg, op. cit. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III, 1970, "Burra Bazar in 1844", pp. 164-65.

(*paras*) such as Simla, Shambazar, Bagbazar, Jorabagan, Pathuriaghat, with their big houses—the opulent households functioning for a considerable period as a socio-cultural nucleus. At the next stage, at an increasing rate, there would be the growth of *kothabaris* or masonry (*pucca*) houses of middle class people—office assistants, subordinate officials, pleaders, physicians, small landowners—forming a complex hierarchy reflected in the size of the houses. Alongside these, there would be the thatched or tiled huts bearing close links in terms of services with the big houses and the masonry houses.<sup>55</sup>

, On the river front the Bengali town, if it may be so called, exhibited marks of strong traditionalism in economic activity carried on by Bengali trading castes in commodities from the depths of the countryside. Trade in split bamboos was once perhaps a major activity along the elongated axis on the river front called Darmahata (mart for split bamboos, later on mats). The area fell within the revenue jurisdiction of the village Sutanuti over which the Sobhabazar Raj family had acquired the right to collect ground rent and tolls.<sup>56</sup> It is clear from the papers in connection with a lawsuit that the area was gaining increasing complexity with the growth of settlements and yielding tolls on mat, straw and timber—all basic to the economy of a Bengali river-front town. In the mid-19th century the area had acquired the character of an emporium. Close to Darmahata Street was Baniatola, probably a late 18th century formation, since it is marked prominently on an early 19th century plan of Calcutta used here as a basic cartographic reference material. In the mid-19th

<sup>55</sup> The growing number of masonry constructions along with concentrations of huts (slums) can be traced from J. A. Schalch's Plan of the City of Calcutta and its Environs etc. (1825); F. W. Simms, Plan of Calcutta from Actual Survey (1847-1849); City and Environs of Calcutta, Surveyor General's Office, 1861; Calcutta Surveyed during the years 1887-1894, Surveyor General's Office, 1895. For a summary of data on the number of houses, etc. see A. K. Ray, *A Short History of Calcutta*, Census of India, 1901, p. 58. Also see Appendix V—"Some Representative Bengali Neighbourhoods".

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix X—"Some Materials on the Local History of Sutanuti—Papers mainly relating to Sobhabazar Raj Family".

century it was dominated by Bengali spice merchants. Other business areas close to Darmahata and the river front were Ahiritola and Sobhabazar, dominated by grain, linseed and gunny bag dealers overwhelmingly from the Bengali trading castes.<sup>57</sup>

In the complex interaction of forces which lay behind the growth of the so-called Bengali town, the comparatively new force represented by the white collar occupations was not so markedly visible in the mid-19th century. Certain areas may be singled out as representing the new tendency in urban concentration. But the weight of the earlier forces of urban growth still lay heavy on the growing structure of the town. Till possibly the early 20th century the cumulative effect of a succession of urban development schemes had not made itself felt on the growth of neighbourhoods partially free from more than a century-old urban landlord tradition. People with little capital but with reasonably paying jobs succeeded in creating a genuine suburb of their own only after an almost heroic measure of municipal organisation had been taken in the second decade of this century. This might be regarded as the belated fulfilment of a social logic derived from a long continued pattern of migration of gentlefolk from the rural areas of Bengal.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *The New Calcutta Directory*, pt. IX, pp. 7, 14, 61-62, 154-55.

<sup>58</sup> See Postscript I—"Some Calcutta Neighbourhoods—Past and Present", especially the section on Ballygunge.



### CHAPTER III

## Fortune-makers and Family-founders

Next to the original population of scattered hamlets, Calcutta's earliest settlers were almost indisputably the Setts<sup>1</sup> (spelt as Seats in British records and also as Seths), associated, by caste, with the cloth and yarn trade, which was the *raison d'être* of early Calcutta. They are believed to have migrated from Saptagram, the great port of Portuguese trade which had declined because of the silting up of the river Saraswati sometime in the 16th century.<sup>2</sup> The British records, otherwise so silent about Indian families involved in business transactions with the British, refer to the Setts in very meaningful terms.

"In consideration that Jonnundun [Janardan] Seat [names of four other Setts follow] will keep in repair the highway between the Fort's landmark to the northward on the back side of the town, we have thought fit to abate them in a bigha of their garden rent which is about Rs. 55 . . . and they being possessed of this ground which they made into gardens before we had possession of the towns and being the company's merchants and inhabitants of the place."<sup>3</sup>

". . . and none can be proposed as a Capable Man . . ., but the Seats Family who are indeed our most secure merchants and yearly take great share of our Dadney [advance]; that we judge it our interest to encourage all persons that bring in

<sup>1</sup> Calcutta Committee of Revenue, Fort William, June 22, 1778. The Setts are described as "former proprietors of Sutanuti".

<sup>2</sup> N. N. Sett, *Kalikatastha Tantubanik Jatir Itihas* (A History of the Merchant-weaver Caste in Calcutta), Calcutta, 1930, p. 14. G. D. Bysack, "Kalighat and Calcutta", *Calcutta Review*, 1891, vol. 92, p. 319.

<sup>3</sup> Consultations, Fort William, September 11, 1707 in C. R. Wilson, *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*, vol. I, p. 289.

the best cloth and they [the Seats] are generally those who have most influence over the weavers, which must be men of substance and credit.”<sup>4</sup>

“Barnarse [Baranasi] Seat late Broker dying in October last Bissnodas [Baisnabdas] Seat succeeds . . . [he] has great credit in the country.”<sup>5</sup> “The Merchants were now called in and asked what sums they would have affixed to their several names and sets they now settled at the Board. The Seats being all present at the Board inform us that last year they dissented to the employing of [some names follow] they being of a different caste and consequently they could not do busines with them, upon which account they refused Dadney and having the same objection to make this year, they propose taking their shares of the Dadney if we should think proper to consent thereto.”<sup>6</sup>

In a resolution confirming Shyamsunder Sett, eldest son of Baisnabdas Sett, as broker, the Council remarks on his usefulness: “The affluence of his fortune to secure Merchants bad Debts who by Calamity have set with great losses.”<sup>7</sup>

The decline of the Setts began after the Company switched over from the indirect to the direct agency for procurement of goods in 1753.<sup>8</sup> The early Setts live in the traditional history of Calcutta as the “jungle clearing pioneers” (*jangal kata basinda*) and as pious Baisnabs. The piety of Baisnabdas is almost legendary. He was long remembered in Calcutta for the unique practice of sending the holy Ganges water in containers under his seal to distant places in India.<sup>9</sup> Tanumani, his mother, was noted for her

<sup>4</sup> Fort William, April 14, 1719 in C. R. Wilson, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Fort William, January 9, 1724/25, para 53, quoted in *Bengal, Past and Present*, January-June, 1960, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Fort William Consultation, May 23, 1748 in Rev James Long, *Selections from Unpublished Records*, Calcutta, 1869, vol. I, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Fort William General, December 24, 1739, para 99 and 100, quoted in *Bengal, Past and Present*, January-June, 1960, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. I, 1965, pp. 6-9, 157.

<sup>9</sup> L. N. Ghose, *The Modern History of the Indian Chiefs, Rajas, Zamindars, etc.*, pt. 2, p. 154.

charities at Brindaban and for building twelve temples of Siva near Calcutta.<sup>10</sup>

Their idol of Gobindaji, the family deity of the Setts, introduced an element of Baisnab refinement in a rude bazar town. Baisnabism in the 18th century had behind it a body of cultural tradition that had grown, not by mere coincidence, in the towns on the Bhagirathi. The Setts and the Basaks were the earliest carriers of that tradition in Calcutta.

Baisnabdas died in circumstances of declining fortune. A court document, describing Baisnabdas's position, is moving in its contents.<sup>11</sup>

The Setts, though fallen from pre-eminence in the late 18th century, remained, along with the Basaks, owners of extensive landed properties in Burrabazar which commanded the highest land value in the Indian town.<sup>12</sup> But as they proliferated many of the Sett families were reduced to owning pathetic little pieces of real estate, the picture made gloomier by petty litigation. In the early 19th century some of the Setts were in money-lending business<sup>13</sup> or entering new professions opened up by English education.<sup>14</sup>

The Basaks were closely related to the Setts through inter-marriage. Tradition has it that they migrated along with the Setts from Saptagram. A list of merchants trading with the East India Company in the early 18th century shows the preponderance of the Setts, but it also mentions some

<sup>10</sup> C. R. Wilson, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 199.

<sup>11</sup> Deposition of Ramdullol Mitter in the Supreme Court case, *Bolakee Sing vs Gopinath Seal*, March 14, 1795, MCSCR, Calcutta High Court. See N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 241-42.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta", serial no. II. The number of wills and inventories relating to the Setts in the Calcutta High Court is very considerable, e.g. O.W. 11316, O.W. 2626, O.W. 3061, O.W. 2919, O.W. 2741.

<sup>13</sup> "Leading Hindu Families in Calcutta", Foreign Dept. Misc. Records, 1839, reproduced in B. N. Bandopadhyay (ed.), *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*, Calcutta, 1949, vol. 2, pp. 753-56, entry no. 10 in the list.

<sup>14</sup> N. N. Sett, *op. cit.* Sett's book gives instances of what occupations some of the later Setts were engaged in. Apart from this, my interviews with some Sett families in contemporary Calcutta created this impression.

Basaks.<sup>15</sup> From the mid-18th century the Basaks become more prominent in the documents. Sobharam Basak is second in the list of the Indian inhabitants of Calcutta receiving restitution money for the sack of Calcutta from the new Nawab of Murshidabad after Plassey.<sup>16</sup>

Sobharam died in 1780. He left altogether thirty-seven houses, situated mainly in the great Bazar, and three gardens and one pond in different parts of Calcutta. In his warehouse there were cotton piece-goods of different types mainly in demand in the European market. There were 891 pearls (61 large sized) in his personal possession, 413 diamonds and 35 rubies, besides gold *mohors*, gold thread, etc. Further, in his warehouse there were 1,745 bales of cotton, five maunds of spices and 18 maunds of opium. He had *aurangs* or cloth godowns-cum-bleaching centres in nine key cloth-producing areas in Bengal. The debts to his estate in bonds from Europeans amounted to Rs. 5,27,112 and from Indians to Rs. 53,083. For ventures to Suez, Bombay, Bussrah, etc., Rs. 45,751 was due to his estate. The total value of his estate cannot, however, be ascertained because the value of his extensive house property, jewels and goods is not known.<sup>17</sup>

The details of Sobharam's estates indicate the variety of money-making activities open to the Indian merchant in the late 18th century—transactions in cotton piece-goods and spices, the former presumably for the European market; in opium, presumably for China; in commodities for coastal Middle East and Persian Gulf countries, and in bonds from Europeans obviously needing capital to exploit opportunities in the East.

One striking element in the picture was the extent of Sobharam's house property in Calcutta. Perhaps Sobharam

<sup>15</sup> List of merchants in C. R. Wilson, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 364-65. For some details of the family history of the Basaks and also for the self-image of the Sett-Basak community, see Dilip Basu (ed.), "The Early Banians in Calcutta", *Bengal, Past and Present*, January-June, 1971, pp. 30-45.

<sup>16</sup> Fort William Consultation, September 18, 1758, in Rev. James Long, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta": Sobharam Basak. One maund is roughly 37 kg.

was pursuing it as a business or treating it as a mere shock-absorber in the face of business fluctuations. Judged in the general social context it would have been in any case unusual for a money-maker to ignore the steady flow of rent from tenanted houses and land in growing Calcutta. The security of this income must have attracted Sobharam and other fortune-makers in Calcutta but became of paramount importance for their successors. Sobharam, the genuine 18th century merchant of a mercantile caste, was leading the way to a society of rent receivers.

A visit to the site of Sobharam's dwelling house (a street in Burrabazar bears his name) strikes one with the impression of a cluster of buildings with the Jagannath temple (Sobharam's own construction) in the background. The dwellings and temples of the Setts and other Basaks are in the near vicinity. It is not difficult to imagine Sobharam as a patron of Brahmins and Baisnabs and pursuing intense religious and traditional social activity in later years after a career of hectic money-making. In his will he left donations to religious persons amounting to Rs. 37,675, including Rs. 3,000 to schoolmasters (pandits).<sup>18</sup>

Among the direct descendants of Sobharam, Radhakrishna Basak became *Dewan* to the Bank of Bengal. He died in 1846, leaving behind him the reputation of being an intensely religious person. In his time, the family had given up trade and had suffered, according to family tradition, some decline in fortune, leading to the sale of some property to Motilal Sil, the rising money-maker in the early 19th century.

## II

Unlike the Setts and Basaks, the Debs of Sobhabazar did not rise as a group. The fortune of the family was made by

<sup>18</sup> Will of Sobharam Basak (O.W. 2978), MCSCR. Of the donations made by Sobharam in his will were "Rs. 15,000 for reading of the books Mahabharata, Ramāwṇ [*Ramayana*] and Bhagbot; Rs. 3,000 for making

one man, Nabakrishna, who brought into money-making almost the same spirit as that of a traditional merchant but whose sphere of activity was a new non-mercantile world opened up by western advent.

Nabakrishna's family had some experience in the management of civil affairs. Family tradition says that his forefathers held responsible positions in Mughal times and that the Debs generally had close connections with Murshidabad.<sup>19</sup> This may well be credible in view of Nabakrishna's excellent knowledge of Persian. He started as a Persian teacher to Warren Hastings as early as 1750 when Hastings first landed in Calcutta. By 1756 he became Persian clerk or Munshi to the Company.<sup>20</sup> In the crucial days of 1756-1757, he rendered useful service to the British by collecting intelligence and arranging for the supply of provisions to the beleaguered Britishers near Calcutta at the time it was sacked by the Nawab of Bengal. Nabakrishna himself summed up his services to the British in two petitions addressed to the British authorities.<sup>21</sup>

Evidence of Nabakrishna's importance is available from a variety of documents after 1765. In the Persian correspondence of the period from 1766 to 1769 Nabakrishna appears as an intermediary between the Indian princes and nobles on the one hand and the Company's government on

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brick steps at riverside, Rs. 2,500 for building the [godly] house at Sripant, for making brick steps at ditto; Rs. 125 for the deity at Colly Gaud [Kalighat], to the places of devotion, Goshains, Adccarnies, Bostoms, and Byragees in Calcutta and in the villages about it to be given to them each according to their merit . . . Rs. 3,000"

<sup>19</sup> L. N. Ghose, op. cit., p. 90, N. N. Ghose, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*, 1901, pp. 1-8

<sup>20</sup> N. N. Ghose, op. cit., pp. 9-10. Also, see review of *Life of Maharaja Nava Krishna Deva Bahadoor of Sobhabazer* by Bipin Behary Mitra, in *Calcutta Review*, 1880, vol. 70, pp. xxx-xxxix, for the reviewer's comments on Nabakrishna's proficiency in Persian and his services to the English. See also B. N. Bandopadhyay (ed.), op. cit., vol. 2, p. 424 for quotation from *Samachar Chandrika* (May 19, 1832) regarding Nabakrishna's service as a banian to Lord Clive and his services to the English.

<sup>21</sup> Foreign Dept., Select Committee, March 10, 1767, Reference 1767 (II), pp. 212-18; also Proceedings of the Council of Revenue, Fort William, November 18, 1777.

the other.<sup>22</sup> In 1767 he was appointed Political Banyan to the Company.<sup>23</sup> Nabakrishna figured as the most prominent person in the proceedings of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, especially with reference to new property rights acquired by him within the city of Calcutta. In 1774 he obtained the unusual right of holding the farm of Sobhabazar in perpetuity.<sup>24</sup> The bazar became the property of the Dcb family. The coveted right of the rentier of the bazar did not go undisputed. Attempts were made by Nabakrishna's rivals, Raghu Mitra and Madan Datta, both highly influential and belonging to families established earlier, to set up rival bazars. Nabakrishna's exclusive right was, however, established. In 1778 Nabakrishna was granted the taluk of Sutanuti, which amounted to an exclusive right to collect the ground rent and grant *pattas* or leases in Sutanuti, representing the greater part of North Calcutta or the Indian town. At least for a certain period of time this was quite profitable, though later on its value declined.<sup>25</sup>

In a judicial document Nabakrishna appears as a judicious lender of money seeking to redeem a mortgage bond from Gobinda Charan Sett of the declining merchant group. Gobinda Charan had mortgaged his portion of 21 houses and gardens in Calcutta for Rs. 21,000 and had failed to pay off.<sup>26</sup> Revenue documents reveal Nabakrishna as in-

<sup>22</sup> *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, vol. 2 (1767-1769), p. 93 (no 332). From the Vazir Shuja-ud-daula, Nawab of Oudh, to the Governor: "... hopes that all the affairs of the empire will, by the Governor's wisdom and zeal..., be regulated in the same manner as they were formerly settled by Lord Clive and Raja Nobkissen". References to Nabakrishna's similar intermediary role occur in CPC, vol. 2, p. 380; also vol. 2, supplement, p. 4, letter 12, pt. I, letter 1, p. 5, etc.

<sup>23</sup> Foreign Dept., Government of India, Select Committee, January 16, 1767.

<sup>24</sup> Calcutta Committee of Revenue, Fort William, December 7, 1775; CCRFW, May 12, 1778, "Nubkissen's Petition that Mechuabazar may be let out to him".

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix X—"Some Materials on the Local History of Sutanuti—Papers mainly relating to the Shobhabazar Raj Family."

<sup>26</sup> Rajah Nobkissen, Mortgage Bond from Govindchurn Sett (1770), Will index no. 1960. In the Register of Deeds of Calcutta Houses and Lands the following entry appears: "No. 1597, 11th November, 1788—Sophia Atkins

volved in salt business in one year and in the Sezewalship (tax collection) of the rich Bengal district of Burdwan in another.

Nabakrishna's knowledge of affairs and worldly sense were obviously a source of monetary profit, and money combined with these gifts gave him an unusual influence in the exercise of which he did not seem to have overreached himself.

In the light of documents available on Nabakrishna a letter cited by Nabakrishna's biographer acquires significance and credibility. From internal evidence it appears that the writer of the letter was an influential servant of the Company and was close to Clive.<sup>27</sup> "I should be very happy in England", he writes, "was not my little fortune exposed to so heavy a risk in Bengal by the share I hold in the joint concern in trade there under the direction of the late Mr. Hoissard. . . ."<sup>28</sup>

"... You will not think it unreasonable in me if I request your becoming my security for what the Mayor's Court . . . may demand of the several proprietors for their shares in the concern. The risk I am exposed to . . . becomes daily so alarming. . . .

"You will be advised . . . of great changes here in East India affairs, of the appointment of . . . four Judges to establish a Supreme Court of Judicature in Bengal. Amongst these Judges . . . is Robert Chambers, Esq. . . . ; upon mentioning to me one day his having a desire to learn both the Persian and Bengalee languages . . . I immediately mentioned your name and added that, as you had had almost the sole direction of Lord Clive's Persian correspondence and a great part also of Verelest's, and acted as Political Banyan to them

for Sa. Rs. 7000 mortgages to Mahahrajah Nobkissen Bahadur, an upper roomed house and ground (7 cottas) in Durumtullah . . .", Firninger (ed.), "History of Calcutta Streets and Houses" in *Bengal, Past and Present*, 1917, p. 173.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of John Knott to Raja Nabakrishna, quoted in N. N. Ghose, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-29.

• <sup>28</sup> Reference to Daniel Hoissard's trade concerns occurs in N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 105.



both whilst they were Governors of Bengal, I thought no man as fitter to answer his expectations. . . . Besides I told him the great advantage your conversation would be to him upon the general politics of Hindustan. Mr. Chambers will necessarily want a Banyan when he arrives in Calcutta . . . and though you are much better experienced in politics than in trade, yet I suppose Mr. Chambers will not trade much. . . . But my chief motive in recommending you to Mr. Chambers is that his protection and friendship may be serviceable to you. . . .”

Nabakrishna's success as a fortune-maker was a phenomenon of the changing times. He was the most successful intermediary in a society of intermediaries placed in a highly fluid situation and, being most successful, stood at the apex of a pyramid at the base of which stood the *sarkar* or the manager of the European household. The fortune he made can be estimated from a variety of legal and land revenue documents of the late 18th and early 19th century.<sup>29</sup>

A story was long current that Nabakrishna secured for himself the major share of plunder from Nawab Siraj-ud-daula's secret treasure of whose existence neither Clive nor any of his associates was aware. There is a tinge of romance about this story and Nabakrishna's descendants would not wholly dismiss this as a canard, though his biographer does so.

### III

While Nabakrishna represented a force of social climbing at an individual level, and while the Setts and Basaks rose and fell through the medium of a highly specialised trade and craft, the gold-merchant families which rose to prominence traditionally followed diverse methods to gain wealth. Being the most mobile mercantile community in Bengal, moving from port to port or from capital to capital with the rise and decline of these places, bearing the stigma of caste degrada-

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta". See also section IV of this chapter.

tion and the dubious morality of the bazar and the port town, and of supposed association with the Baisnab life style, the Subarnabaniks represent the essence of *baniadom* in Bengal, and the *baniadom* of the late 18th and early 19th century Calcutta in particular.<sup>30</sup> True, their rivals in Calcutta in the sphere of mercantile activity were many individuals of non-mercantile high castes, yet the Malliks and Sils, the Dattas, Dhars and Lahas (some of the surnames and patronymics of the Subarnabaniks) impart a historical depth to the phenomenon of *baniadom*, representing a long association of the community with the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, the Danish and the English as purveyors of goods, lenders and changers of money, bullion merchants and go-betweens.

The families that stand out from the rest of the Subarnabanik community in late 18th and early 19th century Calcutta were the Malliks of Burrabazar (Sinduriapatti), the Malliks of Pathuriaghat-Chorebagan and the Roy family of Posta.<sup>31</sup> The names of the Malliks occur in connection with the early 18th century consultations of the East India Company, but the precise nature of their business transactions cannot be determined.<sup>32</sup> In the late 18th and the early 19th century the Malliks are occasionally mentioned as banians in connection with various business transactions.<sup>33</sup> But the

<sup>30</sup> For a high caste view of Subarnabanik life style, etc., see J. N. Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, first edition, Calcutta, 1896; reprinted, 1968, pp. 158-60. For a view of Subarnabanik self-image, see N. N. Laha, *Subarnabanik Katha O Kirti*, vols. 1-3. See also H. H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, vol. 2, entry on Subarnabaniks.

<sup>31</sup> L. N. Ghose, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-71, 157-60.

<sup>32</sup> The names of at least three Malliks appear as "Native Commissioners" of Calcutta in connection with the disbursement of restitution money in 1758, see Rev. J. Long, *Selections from Unpublished Records of Govt.*, Calcutta, 1869, pp. 148-49.

<sup>33</sup> Ramkrishna Mallik of the Pathuriaghat Mallik family is referred to as a "banker" entrusted with the transit of Company's goods for Calcutta in 1769 (*Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, vol. 2, letter no 1517). Letter from Ramkrishna Mallik submitting proposals for a remittance to China (Public Dept. Records, Fort William, Calcutta, January 31, 1797). Two hundred and fifty-nine chests of opium mortgaged to Nemychurn (Burrabazar Mallik) and Ramkrishna were being shipped to China (Public Dept. Records, Fort William, Calcutta, August 8, 1791). Other references to Ramkrishna and Nemychurn also occur in connection with mortgage bonds,

Burrabazar Malliks shoot into prominence through one of the most complicated and protracted law-suits in the judicial history of Calcutta.<sup>34</sup> The law-suit was an adequate index of the extent of fortune left by Nemaicharan Mallik (Nemychurn in the English records). The personality of Nemaicharan, the banian, is graphically described in the memoirs of a European solicitor, who had close association with some opulent families of Calcutta.<sup>35</sup>

Nemaicharan was supposed to have left a fortune of three crores—a figure for which no documentary evidence is available. However, he left 96 premises in Calcutta and a will which accounts for presumably Rs. 24 lakhs in liquid cash.<sup>36</sup> No computation is possible of his other assets—real estates, jewels, apparels, shawls etc. When Nemaicharan died, his eight sons were supposed to have torn his precious shawls into precisely eight pieces each.

The pages of the early 19th century Bengali journal *Samachar Darpan* are full of references to the exploits of the Burrabazar Mallik family, namely that, when the Mallik family held a *sradh* or post-funeral feast, villages within a radius of 30 miles around Calcutta got temporarily depopulated because all the people in want or in search of a spectacle would tend to gravitate to the city to get a share of the Malliks' largesse, so great was the reputation of the Mallik Babus.<sup>37</sup>

The event which ripped apart the Mallik family was the *sradh* of Nemaicharan Mallik over which a law-suit started in the Supreme Court of Calcutta in 1807 and was lying in appeal at the Privy Council in England in 1831, involving

godown rent and supply of goods to the Company in the Public Dept. records of the 1790s.

<sup>34</sup> *Samachar Chandrika*, quoted in *Samachar Darpan*, June 19, 1830, see B. N. Bandopadhyay, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 415-16. Also see Appendix XI—"The Hindu Joint Family as a House of Cards—Nemaicharan Mallik's Will case".

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix XI.

<sup>36</sup> N. K. Sinha, op. cit., vol. III, p. 90.

<sup>37</sup> *Samachar Darpan*, May 15, 1830 in B. N. Bandopadhyay, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 538-39.

up to that year, as a paper reports, Rs. 600,000 in expenditure. The dispute among Nemaicharan's sons was over the amount of money spent on the *sradh*. Nemaicharan's two elder sons—the executors of his will—claimed to have spent Rs. 800,000 while his six younger sons considered that the amount could not have exceeded Rs. 200,000.<sup>38</sup>

Though both the law-suit and the *sradh* were ruinous for the family business, branches of the family managed to survive as urban landlords. Ruplal Mallik, son of Nemaicharan's brother, owned an imposing mansion on the Chitpur Road, the main thoroughfare of the Indian town. It is marked prominently on Schalch's Plan of Calcutta (1825). If, according to family tradition, Nemaicharan inherited 40 lakhs from his father, Ruplal's father might have inherited another 40 lakhs. Unfortunately the judicial records so far unearthed do not give a full inventory of the estates of the Burrabazar Malliks. But a news item, a short obituary notice of Ruplal Mallik in the most widely circulated Bengali newspaper of the time, mentions that Ruplal, at his death, left one crore, or ten million, rupees worth of property from which his four sons were to get Rs. 15 lakhs each and the rest was to be distributed among his wife, daughter, family priest and spiritual preceptor, with a provision for one lakh of rupees to be spent on his *sradh*.<sup>39</sup>

About the Mallik family of Pathuriaghat-Chorebagan, the judicial records say very little. The silence of the available documents is extremely misleading because in the traditional history of Calcutta and in the history of the Subarnabanik community in Calcutta, the family holds perhaps the most prominent place.<sup>40</sup> Members of the family were usually recognised as *dalapatis* or heads of a large number of families of their own caste. To a branch of the family belongs the Marble Palace of Calcutta—a curious but impressive mixture of marble and concrete with Victorian bric-à-brac, a

<sup>38</sup> See fn. no. 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Samachar Darpan*, July 15, 1837 in B. N. Bandopadhyay (ed.), op. cit., vol. 2, p. 459.

<sup>40</sup> L. N. Ghose, op. cit., p. 51.

lush expanse of greenery in an urban wilderness, a menagerie and a home for the family deity with a traditionally free kitchen. Though built a little later than the period covered in this study, this is a monument to the ascendancy of the Bengali *bania* acquiring the honorific title of Raja.

A third group of the Subarnabanik community, the Roys of Posta, rose on the accumulated fortune of Lakshmikanta Dhar, who leaves some fragmentary documentary evidence.<sup>41</sup> According to tradition the family followed the English from Hooghly to Calcutta in the late 17th century and Lakshmikanta was supposed to have been a banker to Lord Clive, helping him in his confrontation with the Nawab and later on offering similar help to the English during the Maratha wars.<sup>42</sup> As appears from all circumstantial evidence, the Subarnabaniks did not deal so much in bills of exchange or hundis as through cash holdings which might tend to reach fantastic proportions. In recognition of his services the English Company offered Lakshmikanta a *khelat* or robe of honour.<sup>43</sup> When the Company offered him the title of Maharaja, he is said to have politely declined it in favour of his daughter's only son—Sukhomoy Roy. Sukhomoy became Maharaja by virtue of the title conferred by the Company and the virtually defunct Mughal Empire of which he also became a Mansabdar of ten thousand horse—a real feat of equestrian imagination.<sup>44</sup>

Sukhomoy Roy added to the fortunes of his grandfather

<sup>41</sup> *Luckeycondore vs. William Fullerton*, October 19, 1759, MCSCR. Lakshmikanta filed a claim for Rs 6,300 Bussorah rupees for a shipment made in February, 1755. The merchandise consisted of seven bales of Bengal piecegoods "Whereas Luckeycondore of the Town of Calcutta Banian complainant hath lately exhibited his complaint in writing against Thorum d' Chandlay [name likely to be misspelt in the record] agents for the Royal Prussian Company Defendants . . .", Case Record, September 22, 1758, MCSCR.

<sup>42</sup> M. N. Dutt, *A Short Sketch of Posta Raj Family*, Calcutta, 1900, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, vol. 2, 1762, July 5, letter no. 1557 to Lakhī Dhar: " . . intimates that a Khel'at has been conferred upon him . . ."

<sup>44</sup> B. N. Bandopadhyay, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 753, entry No. 4. See also Appendix XII—"An Imperial Firman for a Calcutta Banker Family".

as a *Dewan* to Elija Impey, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.<sup>45</sup> He became a director of the Bank of Bengal and proprietor of extensive urban properties including a *posta* (storage space on the river embankment) which traditionally bears his name. In the judicial documents the names of his five sons frequently occur, though no complete inventory of his wealth is available. Extensive references to the family occur in the early 19th century Bengali journals. The "garden house" culture of the opulent Calcuttans and the life style of the *habu* owe an extensive debt to the family.

The Subarnabanik families of which the Malliks and Roys are the most prominent examples are particularly representative of the trend towards withdrawal from business and concentration of investment in landed property. The Subarnabaniks are by tradition urban landlords. The non-Subarnabanik families of *bania* origin tended to have a more variegated landed investment. As rural landlords no single Subarnabanik family enjoyed a reputation similar to that of the Tagores, the Debs or the Ghoshals, who were Brahmins and Kayasthas of non-*bania* and relatively non-urban background. The Subarnabaniks as a community were prominent in the cosmopolitan bazars in mid-19th century Calcutta, especially in the Chinabazars attached to the European town, doing extensive retail business mostly with European customers in articles mainly of European manufacture.<sup>46</sup>

#### IV

The gaps in the hitherto available records in regard to the pattern of the estates of leading Subarnabanik families have to be very imperfectly filled in by referring to tradition still prevalent and to very fragmentary data. In the case of high caste families with well-established reputations as Rajas

<sup>45</sup> M. N. Dutt, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

<sup>46</sup> *The New Calcutta Directory*, part IX, Old Chinabazar Street, pp 125-29.

—the Debs and the Ghosals—the records furnish a wealth of detail with many interesting sidelights. •

In 1823-24, the income from a half portion of the estate left by Nabakrishna was Rs. 1,63,715; in 1825-26 the receipts from the estate were Rs. 2,13,932 and in 1829-30 these amounted to Rs. 3,91,858.<sup>47</sup> For the other part of the property no definite information is available till 1867 when it was recorded as yielding an income of Rs. 2,96,929.<sup>48</sup> In 1823-24 income from rural property or zamindari income from the first half of the estate was Rs. 1,03,529; from Calcutta properties including bazars, rented houses and land Rs. 19,777. The most substantial single item of receipts was from a Pargana or rural unit about 300 miles from Calcutta on the periphery of the Bengal Presidency—a classic example of absentee landlordism.<sup>49</sup>

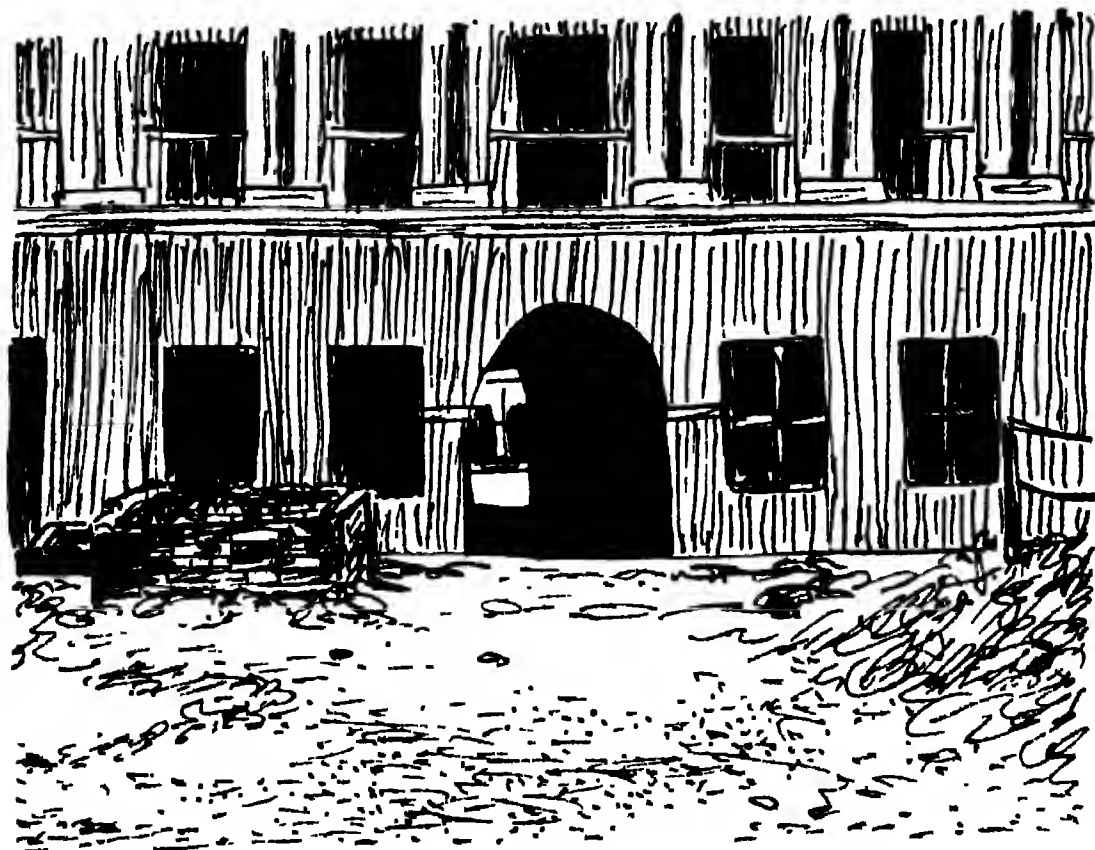
The property left by Gokul Ghosal, banian to Verelest, Governor of Bengal in 1767-69, was worth Rs. 6,00,687 in 1779 when he died.<sup>50</sup> Out of this the urban (including some low-value suburban property) properties account for Rs. 3,26,902. The lower value of rural property can very well be a reflection of the pre-Permanent Settlement situation and the famine of 1770. By the middle of the 19th century the value of rural landed properties appreciated sharply with the expansion of settlement, particularly in areas far off from the metropolis. Like Nabakrishna, Gokul Ghosal purchased the largest rural estates in areas far off from the metropolis (Chittagong and Sandip) which greatly benefited from the expansion of settlement since the early 19th century. The appreciation of the value of rural estates helped to establish the Debs, Ghosals and Tagores as primarily rural landlord families.

<sup>47</sup>Maharaja Rajkissen (O.W. 9841), see Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta", serial no. VI.

<sup>48</sup>Raja Sir Radhakanta Deb Bahadur's Will and Inventory, O.W. 22519. See Appendix III—"Estates . . .", serial no. IX.

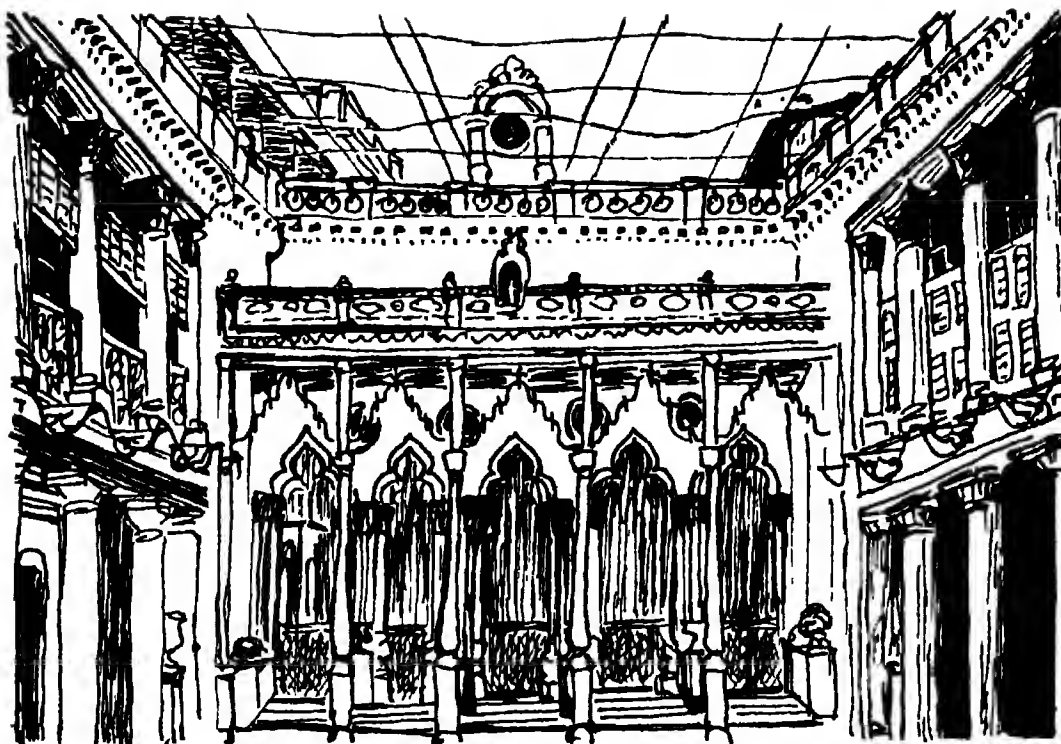
<sup>49</sup>Maharaja Rajkissen (O.W. 9841), see Appendix III—"Estates . . .", serial no. VI.

<sup>50</sup>Gokul Chandra Ghosal (O.W. 2791) see Appendix III—"Estates . . .", serial no. III. It appears from the inventory that the estate might have been undervalued for some reason.



Courtyards in old Sobhabazar family residence.





A courtyard in the Tagore house (senior branch)



A slum near the back entrance of the Sobhabazar family house. The family has been its owner from the early days of Calcutta. Photographed in 1972.

In the purchase of remote rural estates the Tagores of the senior and the junior branch might well have excelled all others. Dwarkanath, who made the fortune for the junior branch of the Tagores, had rural estates scattered over ten districts of the Bengal Presidency.<sup>51</sup> Working initially as minor revenue officers under both Muslim and early Company rule, the Tagores of both branches prospered in business and finally settled down as opulent and aristocratic zamindars. Towards the end of the 19th century the total wealth of the Tagores of both branches was computed at more than Rs. 10,00,000.<sup>52</sup> In the 1880s the senior branch possessed rural estates in eight districts of Bengal and two districts in Bihar—estates whose approximate population was 5,80,000.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of rural estates for Calcutta-based families took some time to be felt. A distrust of rural estates might have characterised the attitudes of a number of family-founders, especially involved in intensive business activity. Such at least was supposed to have been the attitude of Ramdulal De, the millionaire of the early 19th century.<sup>54</sup> He left estates worth Rs. 33,01,424 of which the Calcutta (including suburban) properties accounted for Rs. 6,17,750, yielding an annual rent of Rs. 25,314 from May 1825 to April 1826. By contrast the rural properties were worth only Rs. 58,500 and these were held in districts close to Calcutta. Other items of the inventory are.<sup>55</sup>

1. Sundry promissory notes of the Hon'ble Company at 5%
2. Shares in various insurance offices
3. Sundry bonds mainly from Europeans
4. Sundry bills including China supercargoes bill, notes

<sup>51</sup> Dwarkanath Tagore's Will and Inventory, O.W. 15736. See N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 119-20 for the inventory of his properties.

<sup>52</sup> J. N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>53</sup> L. N. Chose, *op. cit.*, Table A and B, pp. 201-2.

<sup>54</sup> Grish Ghosh, *Ramdoolol De—the Bengali Millionaire*, Calcutta 1869, p. 57.

<sup>55</sup> Ramdulal De, MCSCR, O.W. 10402; for inventory of landed properties see Appendix III—"Estates . . .", serial no. VII.

from Rustomji Turner & Co., Davidson & Co., Palmer & Co., etc.

5. Sundry bills bad and doubtful
6. Sundry mortgage bonds considered recoverable
7. Sundry small bonds and bills
8. Sundry mortgage bonds and bills considered bad and doubtful
9. Ship *David Clerk*
10. Four shares in Sauger Island Society
11. Other items, mainly balances due from different companies

When one of the two sons of Ramdulal De died in 1854, his estates in Calcutta were worth Rs. 3,62,862 and the value of his zamindari properties was worth more than Rs. 2,00,000.<sup>56</sup> The proportion of zamindari properties to urban real estate had registered a substantial increase in one generation.

Notwithstanding the growing relative importance of rural estates for the future of the landed families of Calcutta, the purchase and ownership of urban real estates by the fortune-makers and family-founders of Calcutta continued to remain a crucial element in the urban situation. The city owed much of its physical character to the preferences of urban real estate owners as represented by the banians and *dewans* and the original *banias*, the Subarnabaniks, the Setts, and the Basaks. The existence of rented lands, bazars, storage spaces, rented houses, gardens or open spaces, and ponds in and around Calcutta gave the city not only a visual but also a deeper quality of urban growth which continues tenaciously to this day.

## V

For the purpose of getting at the basic reality, these families may be brought under the general category of compradors, but not before qualifying the term in certain ways. The

<sup>56</sup> Asutosh De, MCSCR, O.W. 18293; see Appendix III—"Estates . . .", serial no. VIII.

Setts, Basaks, and Malliks, the Debs, Ghosals, and Tagores, all acquired positions of power and influence through direct and indirect collaboration with the British, but they also represent three distinct categories.

Merchants by caste and hereditary profession, the Setts, Basaks and Malliks represented a group which had supplied goods and cash to the Europeans for several centuries in the pre-colonial era. The Tagore group—the use of the family name may be justified by the unusual forcefulness of the personality of Dwarkanath Tagore—attempted to build on Indo-European cooperation at a relatively sophisticated economic and organisational level in a more mature stage of the colonial rule.<sup>57</sup> The Debs and the Ghosals, however, represented the largest and the most varied group of people who exploited a highly fluid early colonial situation to their maximum advantage through a multiplicity of money-making activities. The comprador role of this group lacked the mercantile dimension of the traditional merchant group and the sophisticated organisational and ideological outlook of the so-called Tagore group.

The classic intermediary type came from the group represented by the Debs and the Ghosals. Nabakrishna, the Political Banian, Gokul Ghosal, Banian to Governor Verelest, and Ganga Gobinda Singh, *Dewan* to the Calcutta Committee of Revenue, represented primarily the spirit of opportunism. The fact that they could use a probably traditional equipment, that is, knowledge of Persian and of the intricacies of revenue and accounts—was essentially a part of this opportunism. The power they came to acquire was so ephemeral that seizing on every opportunity, however small, was essential. Nabakrishna was a political banian, serving mainly as an intermediary between the Indian princes and the Company. As *Dewan* of the Committee of Revenue, Ganga Gobinda Singh practised perfect brinkmanship, recklessly using his opportunities so long as he could hold on to his office. His tenure did not last more than four years. These

• <sup>57</sup> N. K. Sinha, op. cit., vol. III, pp. 118-19. See also Appendix XIII—"Dwarkanath Tagore's Political Views—An Interpretation of Collaboration."

people stood at the apex of a pyramid whose lower levels were crowded by an increasing number of people grabbing whatever could be had by procuring goods, farming revenue and lending money to Europeans.

## VI

In the use of opportunities following from European presence, one of the earliest family-founders, Gobindaram Mitra of Kumartuli in Calcutta, may be supposed to have set an example for later generations to follow. Gobindaram was the Deputy Collector or the Black Zamindar of Calcutta from 1739 to 1752. The following version of the story of Gobindaram Mitra is given by a mid-19th century writer on the evidence mainly of the Public Department Records.<sup>58</sup>

Holwell, who was appointed Collector and Zamindar of Calcutta in 1752, demanded the production of the zamindari accounts from the commencement of Gobindaram's induction to office, but was told that all the documents before 1738 had been destroyed in the great storm and that the largest portion of those belonging to subsequent years had been devoured by white ants. Gobindaram was yet in power, and not a single person ventured to stand forth as his accuser. Holwell's zeal received little support from the Council among whom the Black Zamindar had made friends. Gobindaram argued that every Raja's or Zamindar's *Dewan* was invariably granted some farms for his own profit, and that he could not be expected to keep up the equipage and attendance necessary for an officer in his station on fifty rupees a month. Holwell remarked that as Gobindaram con-

<sup>58</sup> *Calcutta Review*, vol. 3, 1845, quoted in L. N. Ghose, op. cit., pp. 26-27. Gobindaram Mitra was ordered to submit an account of all the farms he ever held and also an account of his profits (Public Dept. Records, Proceedings, Fort William, December 7, 1754). The Board opined that Mitra was accountable for the profits he had made and that he should pay the sum of Rs. 4,786 with interest thereon from October, 1752 (P.D.R., 1755, pp. 42-48). See also R. C. Sterndale, *An Historical Account of the Calcutta Collectorate*, Calcutta, 1885, pp. 14-16.

fessed to having plundered "agreeably to the maxims of his own nation", so the laws of his own nation should be the measure of his punishment. But the Council was not disposed to inflict the lash or fetters on the first native in the settlement. They threw every impediment in the way of the prosecution, which therefore fell to the ground.

Gobindaram Mitra, however, could not exploit a field as extensive as the one open to Ganga Gobinda Singh. Ganga Gobinda rose from the position of a local keeper of revenue records to become *Dewan* to the Calcutta Committee of Revenue in a particularly fluid and transitional phase of experimentation with revenue organisation. In the dispute between Warren Hastings, the Governor-General, and the Council, he sided with Hastings against the majority of the Council, which dismissed him from the office of the *Dewan* of the Calcutta Committee of Revenue. With Hastings' support he was, however, restored to the office in 1776 and got the position of *Dewan* in the newly constituted Committee of Revenue in 1781, with Prankrishna Singh, his son, as his *naib* or deputy.<sup>89</sup>

"Few Company servants who had to work with Ganga Gobinda Sinha [Singh] shared Hastings' enthusiasm for him. All admitted his great expertise in revenue matters but they found it impossible to control him. . . . But to make allegations against Ganga Gobinda Sinha was one thing, to prove them was another. . . . There seems, however, little doubt that many large zamindars felt obliged to put themselves at his mercy and to pay the price of his favours."

The extent of Ganga Gobinda's profits from his office caused a good deal of speculation in his time. Various speculations were also rife about how much he spent on his mother's *sradh*. In a court document Ganga Gobinda was mentioned as having spent 15 to 20 lakhs of rupees on that occasion.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup> P. J. Marshall, "Indian Officials under the East India Company in Eighteenth Century Bengal", *Bengal, Past and Present*, vol. 84, July-December, 1965, pp. 95-120.

• <sup>90</sup> *Ramtanu Mallik and others vs. Ramgopal Mallik and another*, Deposition, November 11, 1815, MCSCR.

Ganga Gobinda, indeed, left a legend behind him—a legend of sharp practice combined with an abrupt reversal of his acquisitive habits in performing his mother's *sradh* in an ideally ruinous manner. More than fifty years later, a traveller thus describes the ancestral village of Ganga Gobinda where the *sradh* was performed: "Reached Jummo-Kundee, the native village of Ganga Govind Sing. . . . His name has acquired a traditional celebrity for the most magnificent *sradh* ever performed in Bengal. The tanks [reservoirs] of oil [edible] and *ghee* [extract from butter] dug on the occasion are yet existing. . . ." <sup>61</sup>

The grandson of Ganga Gobinda, Lala Babu, renounced the pleasures of the world at the height of his enjoyment of life, capturing popular imagination as a kingly beggar who lived like a yogi in his retreat in Brindaban.

## VII

The families founded by Ganga Gobinda and Nabakrishna could survive the strain of religious and social expenditure because of the exceptional size of their fortunes. But even many large accumulations simply withered away. The largest accumulation of wealth in the mid-18th century was that of Omichand—the Sikh-Khatri merchant. No trace of it could be found in the early 19th century. <sup>62</sup> The judicial records and stories of old Calcutta refer to people with fortunes who leave no concrete trace except perhaps in street names. Large ruined buildings have been a feature of Calcutta's physical scene since the early 19th century. <sup>63</sup> And stories

<sup>61</sup> Bholanath Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, London, 1869, pp. 65-66. See Appendix XIV—"Obsequies and Marriages in Old Calcutta".

<sup>62</sup> Omichand's accumulated wealth, according to various witnesses, amounted to forty-five or fifty lakhs. He died in December, 1758. His brother-in-law Huzuri Mal appropriated much of his wealth. Omichand's adopted son Dia Chand wrote in his will in 1792: "Huzuri Mal made over my father Babu Ameerschandji's estate to me in writing but not in effect. . . ." N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 88-89.

<sup>63</sup> "In the visits which the Magistrates are constantly making . . . they are perpetually struck with the appearance of ruinous and decayed premises

were told of how the *babus* ruined themselves on wine, women, Brahmins, dependants and lawyers. Some Bengali proverbs date from such occurrences in late 18th century Calcutta. "If you need money, go to Gouri Sen" (meaning that there is a milch-cow for you), and "Hari Ghosher *goal*" (the cow-pen or the open house of Hari Ghosh) are two popular Bengali proverbs associated with late 18th century personalities in Calcutta.

Yet a number of families of late 18th and early 19th century origin maintained a degree of opulence and a recognised aristocratic status till the late 19th century. The prestige of these families—the Tagores, the Debs, the Ghosals and the Singhs—was still an essential element in the elitist quality of the foremost association of the Indians in Calcutta—the British Indian Association—in the second half of the 19th century. When a parallel association was founded in the late seventies—the Indian Association—it took special care not to alienate the older elite group. The aura of 18th century origin still meant a good deal around the middle of the 19th century in Calcutta's public life—cultural, social and political—in concrete terms. But retention of some kind of dynamism along with inherited wealth was essential for a collaboration in public life with individuals possessing a high degree of educational qualification. These individuals had education rather than land as the economic base for social, cultural and political participation in public life. Such individuals had already been emerging in the early 19th century. But the initiative in the broad area of public life in Calcutta was still in the hands of the comprador-zamindar class. This initiative was slowly to pass into the hands of new groups of people whose basic economic interests were not primarily connected with urban or rural real estates and who were generally educated men from the professions and services—occasionally intellectuals—sometimes founding moderately well-off families.

• either vacant or occupied by remnants of wealthy families." H. D. Sandeman, *Selections from the Calcutta Gazette*, vol. 5, Calcutta, 1869, pp. 473-75.



## CHAPTER IV

# The City as a Centre of Social Change and Continuity

The abrupt transformation of a trading settlement into a seat of far-flung political and economic power was interpreted both as a break and a continuity by the traditional historiographers, so far as this can be verified from a compilation of a later period.<sup>1</sup> The break was interpreted from the perspective of dynastic or political changes, say, from Afghan to Mughal rule and of the collapse in the fortunes of associated families. The continuity was said to have been maintained by the rise in the fortunes of some other families within the same caste, or more accurately sub-caste, which was the *samaj* or society for the purpose of all basic social rites like marriage.

One of the instruments for maintaining the supposed continuity of society was the *ekjai*, that is, an assemblage of *kulins* or men of the highest purity of birth, *ghataks* or registrars of genealogies, and the leading men of the sub-caste concerned in the affair.<sup>2</sup> If successful, such a conference would elevate its organiser and convener to the position of headship of his sub-caste (*gosthipati*).

The organisation of an *ekjai* was not an easy matter. Without a great deal of control over his sub-caste nobody could become a *gosthipati*. Purandar Khan (Khan was a title conferred by the Muslim rulers of Bengal) was such a man. He organised the 13th conference of the south-western branch of the *kayasthas*—the Dakshin-Rarhis. Purandar and

<sup>1</sup> N. N. Basu, *Banger Jatiya Itihas* (Caste History of Bengal), Dakshin Rarhi Khanda (volume on the history of the Dakshin Rarhi subcaste, pt. I).

<sup>2</sup> For observations on the importance of *ekjai* in Hindu society and a description of an *ekjai* held in late 18th century Calcutta, see N. N. Ghose, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur* (1901), pp. 172-76.

the succeeding *gosthipatis* were all celebrated figures in the court of the Afghan rulers of Bengal, and from this association they amassed great wealth. So long as the Afghan rule continued, the Basu family (the descendants of Purandar) maintained its social influence and opulence. After 1576 Mughal imperialistic control spread over Bengal, followed by the collapse in the fortunes of the old *gosthipati* family. The transfer of power from Afghan to Mughal rulers severely affected the fortunes of many leading families of Bengal. That was the period of Man Singh's administration. The Hindu officials selected by him acquired great power over the Mughal rulers. During this period the empire had an administrative centre in Saptagram (Satgaon headquarters of Sarkar Satgaon in *Ain-i-Akhari*). And it was in this period that the Pal family of Satgaon rose in influence through Mughal favour and efficiency in official work. The end of the Afghan rule had caused a dispersal of *kulins* (families of the highest purity of descent) in western Bengal. Many of them now found shelter under Dayaram Pal. Purandar Khan had given the Pal family a position in the higher middle stratum of the sub-caste hierarchy, but the prestige of the family was not unusually high. Now Dayaram Pal started paying attention to improving the status of his family. With the help of the leading masters of the science of genealogy he summoned the representatives of all the high-ranking families of his sub-caste; and by marrying all his children to the highest of *kulins* and by honouring the *kulins* he acquired the position of *gosthipati*.<sup>3</sup>

In 1781 Nabakrishna Deb organised the 22nd conference or *ekjai*. In 1791 he married his son Rajkrishna Deb to the daughter of one of the foremost *kulins*. On the occasion of the marriage, not only mobile illumination but also four thousand cavalry befitting the rank of Nabakrishna, then a Mansabdar of four thousand horse, accompanied the nuptial procession.<sup>4</sup>

The 22nd conference conferred on Nabakrishna the title

\* <sup>3</sup> N. N. Basu, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

of *gosthipati*, but there remained some confusion about the decisions of the conference which affected his status. In 1778 Mr. Justice Hyde of the Calcutta Supreme Court had noted that Nabakrishna was considered a "mean man though rich, a Raja by the way of the Company's making."<sup>5</sup>

In 1794 when his grandson Radhakanta (offspring of his adopted son Gopimohan) was ten years old, Nabakrishna married him to the daughter of the famous *gosthipati* family of Gopicanta Singha Choudhury. Meanwhile he had performed his mother's *sradh* with a grandeur long remembered by the people of Calcutta and also mentioned in court records as a great social event. The marriage conferred on Radhakanta the position of the 13th *gosthipati* of the southwestern branch of the *kayastha* community—a sub-caste which acquired the greatest prominence in Calcutta.<sup>6</sup>

In 1797 Nabakrishna died. In 1813 his son Rajkrishna organised the 23rd conference which was attended by powerful *kulins*. Raja Rajkrishna was deeply attached to *kulagranthas* (genealogical works). The leading custodians of family genealogies used to visit the Sobhabazar palace (the residence of the Deb family) in Calcutta. From them Rajkrishna learnt the science of genealogy. The famous genealogist, old Kasinath Bose, was his chief adviser.<sup>7</sup>

The 24th *ekjai* was a unique event. Other *ekjais* were held only once but the 24th *ekjai* was summoned thrice and described thrice in genealogical works. The reason why the 24th *ekjai* was held thrice is explained by the following circumstances.

The "great" Ramdulal De (the Bengali millionaire of the late 18th and early 19th century) tried to win over the *kulins* from the beginning. Maharaja Nabakrishna had a favourite grandson (daughter's son) named Kalimohan Ghosh who was very distinguished by virtue of appearance, character and family background. Knowing about him, Ramdulal wanted

<sup>5</sup> Hyde Notes, Victoria Memorial Library, manuscript volumes, case of *Monhor Mookherjee and Bridgoobullab vs. Tillock Churn Puckrasst*, February, 17, 1778, p. A18.

<sup>6</sup> N. N. Basu, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 147-48.

to have him as a son-in-law. Nabakrishna got the news and sought to prevent the marriage. Kalimohan lived in his father's house in a village near Calcutta. By a stratagem Ramdulal succeeded in bringing Kalimohan to his own house in Calcutta and, confining them (father and son) through the power of money, he married his third daughter to Kalimohan. Initially done in secrecy, the event was concluded with great pomp. Riders and bandsmen were brought from the Fort and the procession went past the Sobhabazar palace of Maharaja Nabakrishna. This event took the old Maharaja by surprise, and from then onwards a rivalry developed between Ramdulal's family and the Sobhabazar house.<sup>8</sup>

Ramdulal was supposed to have left upwards of one crore and twenty-three lakhs rupees worth of movable and immovable property.<sup>9</sup> After his death in 1825, his sons, Chatu Babu and Latu Babu, organised a grand *sradh* in which they spent six lakhs of rupees. The grandeur of the *sradh* was as great as that of the *sradh* of Nabakrishna's mother. It provided the occasion for inviting all the *kulins* of the sub-caste and all the superior and middle-ranking families. After the conclusion of the great event Chatu Babu felt inclined to become the *gosthipati*. But the influence of the master of genealogical lore, Raja Rajkrishna, had not yet abated (even though he had been dead for some years). On the occasion of Ramdulal's *sradh* Chatu Babu had visited the Sobhabazar palace in person, following the social custom. This visit brought about a *rapprochement* between the two families. But Chatu Babu was looking for an occasion to celebrate an *ekjai*. He had planned to celebrate it on the occasion of his son's marriage. But for various reasons this had not been possible. In course of time a daughter was born to that son

<sup>8</sup> The rest of Section I is summarised from N. N. Basu, op. cit., pp. 154-59, 164-65. For a description of social events in old Calcutta see Appendix XIV—"Obsequies and Marriages in Old Calcutta".

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter II, section I, and Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta"—Ramdulal De, serial No. VII. The inventory reproduced in the Appendix does not mention jewels, precious metals, cash, etc.

and Chatu Babu intended to hold an *ekjai* at the marriage of this infant girl. During this period there was amity with the Sobhabazar Raj family, and when Chatu Babu expressed his intention to Radhakanta Deb (head of the Sobhabazar family group) the latter did not demur.

Chatu Babu began to issue letters of invitation to the *ekjai* to be held on 17th Magh, 1766 Sakabda, that is, sometime in the winter of 1844. The Sobhabazar people became apprehensive about the threat to their social leadership. All the brothers and cousins of the family combined to summon an *ekjai* five days before Chatu Babu's event. Chatu Babu and the Sobhabazar family spared no pains to block each other's plans. As the report goes, one of the chief *kulins* whose presence was sought both by the Sobhabazar family and by Chatu Babu eluded the watch kept for him by the Sobhabazar people at the main river halts and, arriving at Chatu Babu's place, helped in the suitable performance of Chatu Babu's *ekjai*. The father-in-law of this principal *kulin* was very close to the Sobhabazar family, and in his anger at the defiance of his directive by his son-in-law, he seized the portion of the landed estate given to him as a dowry. This was, however, recovered by the *kulin* after a successful lawsuit conducted with financial support from Chatu Babu's family.

The 24th *ekjai* caused a controversy unparalleled in genealogical history. All the *ekjais* were held only once. At this level there were three *ekjais*, two held by the Sobhabazar family and one by their rival, the family founded by Ramdulal De. In 1879 the last *ekjai* was held. The honour of holding this event in the city, causing surprisingly little flutter in society and involving an expenditure of about Rs. 100,000, belonged to the De family. The Sobhabazar family was apparently not interested and did not contest it.

The last *ekjai* held in Calcutta looks like a routine event in the genealogical records, as compiled in the work from which the above narrative is extracted. Much money was said to have been spent—one lakh according to a contemporary estimate—but it caused little flutter in society. The

functional potentiality of the *ekjai* had probably exhausted itself.

## II

The rise and fall of the *ekjai* in Calcutta probably indicated a response to the urban environment. Too many people had been brought in too short a time into the urban set-up and had then acquired permanent residences there. The traditional system of determining social stratification through conferences like *ekjais* was understood by the average people. The *ekjai* recognised the basic reality of change in the social power structure after a period of social and political turmoil and at the same time accorded full recognition to prescriptive status represented by purity of descent and interpreted by the custodians of genealogies.

A relatively large congregation of parvenu families in a very limited space, however, caused complications. The *ekjai* could satisfy the social ambitions of a very limited number of families and, in normal circumstances, the *gosthipati* could come from one family only. But the situation in Calcutta was not the normal situation. There were too many contenders for social leadership. As the nineteenth century wore on towards the middle, the position of the *gosthipati* became more honorific than functional. The real power came to be exercised by the *dalapatis* or the leaders of social functions. To some extent the growth of the institution of *dalapati* and the formal recognition it received from social arbiters like the scholarly editor of a Bengali journal, who was also secretary of the orthodox Hindu religious association in the city—both positions being far removed from tradition—were indications of a changed urban environment. The recognition conveyed to the institution of *dalapati* is contained in the editorial comments in the orthodox Hindu journal *Chandrika*.

Under the caption of "A New Social Faction",<sup>10</sup> *Chandrika* commented that Ashutosh Deb (Chatu Babu) had

<sup>10</sup> The *Chandrika* editorial was fully reported in *Samachar Darpan*,

formed a faction for the purpose of social mixing. This meant, according to the *Chandrika*, that a number of Brahmins of various categories—*kulins*, Pundits, etc.—and *kayasthas* from various hierarchical strata—kinsmen, affines, acquaintances, dependants and rich, honourable and middling householders—had combined with men of position from nine pure *Sudra* castes to accord him the position of the leader of this faction. Actually they agreed, the *Chandrika* continued, not to attend, according to the code of factions, any social occasion without Ashutosh Deb's consent.

"We are extremely gratified", the *Chandrika* observed, "that such a faction had been formed, since at this stage a very large number of people had settled in this city and various celestial and ancestral ceremonies are being performed, underscoring the need for many factions. In the past there were only two factions in this city—one led by the late Maharaja Nabakrishna Deb and another by the late Madan Mohan Datta. All the people of the higher and middle castes belonged to either of the two groups. Gradually the city began to grow and the factions began to flourish. All these factions were branches or sub-branches of the two original factions. . . . However, when somebody withdraws from a faction to form his own, there must have been some reasons for that action. Thus many people dissociate themselves from their original factions when there is disagreement with the leaders, the wealthy forming their own factions and men without wealth joining new ones. We are, however, satisfied with Ashutosh Babu because, unlike other leaders, he had not shown any discourtesy or antipathy to the leader of the original faction. At this stage, a large number of factions would be beneficial because of their effect on the cohesion of groups in preventing men from going the wrong way. So long as the factions agree on the point of Dharma no leader would accept a suspended member from another faction into his own."

The expectation that factions would fulfil the purpose of preservation of Dharma or the ideology of social order acted as a social force up to a point. The Dharma Sabha founded in 1830 in response to the supposed challenge to the ideology of social order posed by the prohibition of *satidaha* (the self-immolation of widows), and the monotheistic offensive of a group of people actually served for some time as the united front of the ideologically orthodox factions against social heterodoxy and deviation.<sup>11</sup>

The logic of factionalism was not, however, long arrested by a common ideology. Within a few years of its foundation the Dharma Sabha became subjected to severe strains, leading to its slow dissolution from the late thirties. The factions behaved more like rival cliques than like groups sharing a common ideology. And it is through this chink in the armour of entrenched groups that the emerging new groups, professing an ideology opposed essentially to the power of the factional chiefs, directed their attack.<sup>12</sup>

The groups that were now aspiring to assert themselves had a much more complex leadership character than the preceding social formations led primarily by opulent families. But the new groups converged on one point, namely, on defying the directives of factional leaders in matters of private belief and social mixing. A wholly new interpretation was put on the Bengali word *daladali* meaning factionalism. For the older groups *daladali* was part and parcel of social interaction, a mode of recreation arousing keen interest in the *homo ludens*. For the new groups it was a kind of perversity foreign to their acquired principles of organisation.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For reports on the Dharma Sabha during 1830-1840, see B. N. Bandopadhyay, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 304-7; vol. II, pp. 575-600. And for an example of the Dharma Sabha measures against social deviation, see Appendix XV—"The Dharma Sabha—A Critical View".

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix XV—"The Dharma Sabha—A Critical View".

<sup>13</sup> Of the anti-Dharma Sabha forces the most vocal in the criticism of factional chiefs and their mediator—the editor of *Chandrika*—were the journals of the ultra-liberals—the *Enquirer*, the *Reformer* and the somewhat less extreme *Jnananeswan*. For instances of such criticism, see Benoy Ghosh (ed.), *Sangbadpatre Banglar Samajchitra*, vol. 4, pp. 793-840. For



The late twenties and thirties were especially a period of confrontation of opposing social forces. Rammohan Roy had sought to impart to it a pronounced ideological character. Actually Rammohan and his immediate followers like the Tagores had emerged out of the earlier social milieu. Their defiance of the comprador-landlord-Hindu orthodox set-up was glaring in the late twenties from the traditional point of view, though for the aggressive newly-educated youth of the thirties much of it was inadequate and even hypocritical. However, the circumstances in which the old comprador-landlord-Hindu orthodox set-up had grown were fast losing their relevance. And a reformulation of the position was felt to be necessary both by Rammohan Royists and the Young Bengal groups along lines basically different from the older, and essentially genealogical, way of looking at society.

### III

One of the clearest formulations regarding the new situation comes from the Rammohan Royists.<sup>14</sup> It has a pronounced tinge of narcissism characteristic of a new social group. Under the caption "The Increased Prosperity of Gourdesh (Bengal)" the journal *Bangadoot* of 13 June 1829 comments :<sup>15</sup>

"During the last few years there had been a considerable increase in wealth in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. We should look for reasons why wealth increases. The present transformation can be explained by increased value of land; secondly, there is more trade in the country, and thirdly, many European gentlemen had gathered here. Plots of land that were bought for Rs. 15 each unit thirty years ago have

more mature criticism in the next stage of Young Bengal development, see *Bengal Spectator*, September 1, 1842, November 1, 1842, as quoted in Benoy Ghosh, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 96-100, 110-11.

<sup>14</sup> The term "Rammohan Royism" was used by the *Friend of India*, as quoted in *The Asiatic Journal*, March, 1836, pp. 163-65.

<sup>15</sup> B. N. Bandopadhyay, op. cit., vol. 1, 1949, pp. 352-54.

now increased in value to the extent of Rs. 300/-. Thus capital [*sampad*: is the word used in Bengali] having expanded through increased land value, more opportunities have opened up in the country. Those people who did not have any status in the past have now acquired distinction.

"Before the rise of the middle class all the wealth of this country was in the hands of a very small number of people, and most of the other people lived in subordination to the few. The benefits that can accrue from this new class are too numerous to be mentioned. Since these people have consolidated themselves into a kind of class, it will in the not too distant future obtain freedom. Examples of such a development are too numerous to be repeated. Look at English history in which such a development can be clearly witnessed. . . . [References are made to "increase of wealth" since the reign of Henry VIII and the subsequent execution of Charles I under "Cromwell, the Butcher's Son, which caused amazement at the power of the people of England".]

"On the contrary, the absence of a middle class between the too-high and the too-low is exemplified in Spain where anybody who acquires some riches spurns mental and physical labour and turns into a Hidalgo, acquiring the impudence befitting a king. A different example (of what happens in the absence of a middle class) can be given from Poland where tenants are sold with lands. From these examples it is clear that because of the existence [growth] of a middle class the people of Bengal are happy beyond a parallel.

"Among the potential fruits of transformation in this country, the most important is the free circulation of money. Wealth like fertilisers is unproductive if heaped up in one place; when distributed it acquires the potentiality for yielding fruits. Now in the city of Calcutta cowries or shells have nearly gone out of use and will soon be absolutely out of circulation. The person who ten years ago earned two rupees a month is now dissatisfied even if he earns twenty rupees. The carpenter who used to work for eight rupees now gets more than sixteen. Rice which was sold for eight annas per maund is now selling for two rupees. . . ."

The writer goes on to elaborate his idea that free trade is at the root of this transformation. He pleads for the lifting of discriminatory duties on Indian goods in England so that there could be a free flow of commodities between the two countries. He belonged to the small but highly articulate group which represented at least a section of the emerging Bengali intelligentsia, interpreting particular situations in universal terms. At that juncture the universalist framework happened to be provided by the ideology of free trade.<sup>16</sup>

The entrepreneurial ideology of the nascent Bengali "bourgeoisie" went far ahead of the realistic local situation where a handful of new mercantile entrepreneurs emerged, but quickly yielded to the colonial economy or to the inner social impulse towards investment in real estates or securities. In 1829, however, such a projection might have seemed unduly pessimistic. The entrepreneurial faith periodically emerged in Bengal society and produced spurts of initiative. The faith inspired a section of Young Bengal in the thirties and forties and produced at least one striking mercantile entrepreneur.<sup>17</sup>

The archetypal middle class being spearheaded by entrepreneurial groups was an idealised interpretation of the emergence of basically white-collar groups in the lower and middle levels of government employment and in the legal, medical and academic professions. Between the amorphous urban masses and the old time opulent families these groups indeed held an intermediate position consisting no doubt of a multitude of indented layers.

The soaring ambitions of Young Bengal and other emerging groups could find occasional outlets in the glamorised

<sup>16</sup> For an opposite view of the situation by socially more orthodox forces, see Appendix XVI—"The European Penetration into the Economy of Calcutta". *The Calcutta Monthly Journal*, January 2, 1830, p. 129 and April, 1830, pp. 140-41, mentions *Chandrika* and *Dharma Sabha* as opposed to European colonisation.

<sup>17</sup> "Ramgopal Ghosh, the young Demosthenes of the Hindu College, became a partner in the firm of Messrs. Kelsall Ghosh & Co. In consequence of good connections in England, this firm did business to a large amount and very successfully..." *The National Magazine*, January, 1897, p. 154, Also N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III, p. 124.

new professions of law, medicine and surgery. But the development of such professions was accompanied by sobering reflections on the state of the economy and society. The major occupational opening for the great bulk of people belonging to the new groups was very naturally in the sphere of clerical and other low-income employment categories. Yet the middle class character of these groups and a certain organic unity among them manifested themselves in some clearly marked directions. Many people in this class had a steady income, however modest, and job security in a country hankering for subsistence. For a certain period a vast field for expansion remained open to this class—the lawyers, teachers, physicians, surgeons and clerks—in northern and eastern India. Though their Young Bengal dream was never realised, the more articulate people of this class could throw themselves with great intensity into politics, literature, religion and spiritualism. They had failed to forge a link with the traditional mercantile castes of Bengal, which had continued to hang on to the market towns of western Bengal or dominate them in East Bengal and Assam. Similarly, they had found little in common with the macro-Indian merchant groups in Calcutta deeply attached to their caste and community traditions and their regional background.

For such a class the traditional factions or *dals* and sub-caste conferences such as *ekjais* were unsuitable as measures of social reorganisation. These measures attached too much importance to a limited number of families and had a pronounced local character. For the new groups being consolidated over an extended base, measures calling for broader and more complex principles of organisation were felt to be necessary. Such principles might progressively have the character of superimpositions over the old ones. But neither the Young Bengal groups nor the Rammohan Royists would tend to be concerned about that aspect of development. The Young Bengal maintained a conspicuous silence over caste, except when they defied Brahminism. The Rammohan Royists extended some concessions to Brahminism in their strictly religious ceremonies but refrained

from any overt recognition of caste in public life. Though the earlier orthodox factions represented a relatively fluid caste situation, their ideological orientation towards the caste principles was palpably clear. The *ekjai* was a highly traditional phenomenon closely related to the caste or sub-caste system. With the emergence and development of new groups in the urban set-up, caste tended to lose its strident overtones. It was subdued to a level at which one married one's children into families of appropriate caste status but avoided a mingling of caste and genealogical concerns with new pre-occupations, literary, intellectual, educational and political.<sup>18</sup>

The financial backing for the literary, intellectual, educational and other public activities of this class was precarious except when fitfully provided by the erstwhile comprador families turned into landlords. But such backing did not ensure the viability of public institutions and voluntary associations. And when the urban middle class groups—the “educated middle class”,<sup>19</sup> according to a later description—sought to move on their own resources they faced a situation in which the initial enthusiasm at the inception of associations or journals died out quickly, causing a remarkable mortality rate for them.<sup>20</sup> The S.A.G.K. or the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge—the association

<sup>18</sup> A characteristic expression of a Bengali intellectual's attitude towards caste in the mid-19th century can be found in the following excerpt. “In our tolerant... age, caste means only a simple refraining from the open embracement of Christianity. What is called the Hindu community is in truth a community of vast latitudinarian principles... But in that dreary period of Bengali progress... [referring to an incident likely to have occurred in the late 18th century] the most appalling fanaticism prevailed on the subject of caste...” Grish Ghosh, *Ramdoollol De*, p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> The term “educated middle class” is used by Surendra Nath Banerjee in connection with the formation of the Indian Association in 1876. Some other contemporary sources suggest a similar motivation.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix XVII—“Voluntary Associations (Indian and European with Significant Indian Participation) in Calcutta and the Immediate Suburbs”. For detailed information on the life of the journals in the early years of the Bengali press, see B. N. Bandopadhyay, *Banglar Samayik Patra (1818-1868)*, Calcutta, 1961. The *Friend of India* of July 7, 1836 (p. 230) puts the total circulation of all Bengali journals at its “utmost limit” at 1000 copies. The *Friend* comments critically on the initial “flaming advertisement” and later languor both of the editors and of the subscribers.

*par excellence* of the new middle class intelligentsia—was perhaps sought to be modelled on the Asiatic Society—a predominantly European organisation. Six years after its foundation in 1838 it was found to be languishing and politics was suggested as a substitute for learned subjects and as a means of arousing fresh interest.<sup>21</sup> The association did not survive. Politics, however, became a major preoccupation of the new groups. In the second half of the nineteenth century two major associations were formed—the British Indian Association and its junior partner, after a time a growing rival, the Indian Association. Both proved to be viable and flourishing up to a point. The cultural and learned associations could hardly get a lasting focus. In the sphere of cultural activity, perhaps the most effective means of expression continued to be the periodic festivals and occasional meetings rather than formal westernised organisational models. The Bengali institution of “adda” or conversational group adapted itself to new tastes, new attitudes and styles. The “adda” needed no endowment or capital backing. And it was not expected to produce results but to carry on a style of life free from hustle.

The above picture is in striking contrast with the grand marriages, *pujas* or *sradh*s that were being celebrated in the Calcutta of the thirties and the forties.<sup>22</sup> The excitement of the moment, the vicarious satisfaction, continued to account for a major share of social and public expenditure.<sup>23</sup> Relatively, very little was spent on city institutions. Nevertheless, institutions came into being—schools, colleges, associations—and often existed on the verge of financial solvency. The mouthpiece of the British Indian Association—the richest association of the Indians in the city—was edited by a government clerk in the late fifties and early sixties, which was a period of grandeur for the journal. He had a remark-

<sup>21</sup> Rajat Sanyal, “Societies for Acquiring General Knowledge in Calcutta in the First Half of the 19th Century”, *Bengal Past and Present*, vol. 94, January-June, 1975.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix XIV—“Obsequies and Marriages in Old Calcutta”.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter V, section V for a description of a community puja festival based on Kaliprasanna Sinha’s *Hutum Panchar Naksha* (1862).

able command of English by Indian standards. But one often wonders, while turning over the files, how few the advertisements were and how few the subscribers, even when this was the foremost journal of the educated urban Bengalis for about two decades. The editor probably overworked himself to death.<sup>24</sup>

Hemmed in by these constraints the educated and urbanised Bengali sought to cultivate sophistication and eloquence. His sophistication could go as far as Anglicism. His eloquence could carry him much further—to the heights of notions of self-government or the depths of the plight of women in Indian society. At one level, the consciousness of this class was represented by a person who was a dissenter from the point of view of the majority of people even in urban society. In the mid-fifties Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar sought to introduce widow marriage in Hindu society. While opposition to him was enormous, support for him was likewise impressive. For some time journals were flooded with articles, letters and appeals upholding widow marriage. But few such marriages took place and practically none among the families backing Vidyasagar. The support was essentially a matter of sentiment and intellectuality.<sup>25</sup> A liberal humanitarianism need not be an ideology of action. The self-immolation of widows was too violent a practice for a liberal to tolerate. The *dals* and *ekjais* were unsuitable. The polygamous or bigamous practices among a number of old opulent families were held to be disgraceful. The institution of concubinage and the nocturnal errands, perhaps once considered right and proper for adult males of the old elite, did not fit in with the new principles of morality. Some of the “excesses” continued but gradually tended to be driven underground.

Western education introduced a theoretical line of entry for lower caste people into the new class and even the urban

<sup>24</sup> Harish Chandra Mukherjee, editor of the *Hindoo Patriot*, died in 1861 at the age of 37. Sivanath Sastri in *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj* refers to his strong addiction to alcohol.

<sup>25</sup> P. Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal—Aspects of Social History*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 119, 127-28.

elite. Practically, however, the class was not so open, though a side-door was discreetly left ajar for people with qualifications unusual for a lower caste Hindu or Muslim. Ideologically, the elite of this class could still assert its faith in openness. Structurally, however, it could hardly escape the realities of caste and communalism. Late in the nineteenth century a commentator argued that changes, presumably among the "educated middle class", had occurred mainly in style and taste.<sup>26</sup> If this was correct, then such a development was consistent with the historical trend of highly defensive urbanism in an overwhelmingly rural society.

#### IV

In matters of taste and style the new class could react much more sharply against the immediately preceding style or cultural tradition of urbanism than it could against the traditional social structure. It is possible to view the new developments in style and taste as a reaction against the traditional culture of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly valley as continued and modified by the late 18th and early 19th century elite groups in Calcutta. A particularly forceful expression of the attitude of reaction comes from a highly respected person of the generation immediately succeeding the ebullient Young Bengal groups. In his high-level opinion moulding journal, conceptualising on matters of basic concern for the new intelligentsia, Rajendralal Mitra, orientalist and librarian of the Asiatic Society, makes a clear statement on the cultural issue.<sup>27</sup>

In tracing the history of entertainments in mediaeval Bengal up to the late 18th century, Rajendralal stresses the disenchantment of people with worldly pursuits in the 16th and 17th century and a turning away of the mind to other-worldly prospects leading to the development of Baisnab

<sup>26</sup> *Hindoo Patriot*, 1872, as quoted in P. Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Calcutta, 1965.

<sup>27</sup> *Bibidharthasangraha*, November-December, 1858; see B. N. Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 464-65. For a Bengali intellectual's approach to new forms of drama, see Appendix XVIII—"Julius Caesar in Calcutta".



community singing. For two hundred years this community singing tradition was dominant. During this period the popular mind sank into ignorance, weakness and servility. Then there was a break-through in the late 18th century under the encouragement of Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia. He was clever and scholarly and used to patronise learned men. But all his gifts were tarnished by licentiousness. The great Bengali poet, Bharatchandra, received his patronage and, under Krishnachandra's influence, left a model of literary obscenity in the poetical work entitled *Bidyasundar*. Krishnachandra also maintained the famous buffoon, Gopal,\* who was encouraged by his master to keep a stream of obscenities flowing. The diffusion of the scurrilous type of singing and versification (in the late 18th century) must have owed a great deal to Krishnachandra. In Rajendralal's opinion these songs and verses were so disgusting that it was impossible even to describe them.

That such scurrilous types of entertainment could not long be appreciated in cultured society was to be expected, observed Rajendralal. But the scurrilous tradition established by Krishnachandra was not abandoned in a short time. The famous Raja Nabakrishna of Calcutta and after him some opulent people of the city enthusiastically patronised the tradition. With their departure such entertainments had declined in the previous twenty years. During that period the *yatra* or the operatic type of entertainment had become popular. But the *yatra*, lacking the form of the classical drama, did not encourage sophistication. Now such encouragement was being furnished by new education. Over the previous four years the drama in its true form was being staged in different parts of the city and witnessed by a combination of rich, aristocratic and educated people. The drama had eliminated the earlier forms of offensive entertainment with accompanying immorality and had encouraged a certain purity of behaviour. The traditional operatic form of entertainment, the *yatra*, was now being conceived after the model of the drama.

\* Recent researches, however, cast doubt on this point.

Rajendralal's observations on the retreat of the earlier forms of entertainment had a precise chronological basis, though many of his other observations reflected a pronounced subjectivity characteristic of a group involved in new socio-cultural development. The tradition of impromptu versification with musical accompaniment—the *Kabi*—had a pervasive presence in the world of urban entertainment for more than half a century. By 1830 most of its gifted exponents were dead. Long afterwards the greatest exponent of the new tradition in its maturest form compared the versifiers to a flock of insects clouding the sky for a time and then disappearing like a cloud.<sup>28</sup> As a historical phenomenon the pervasiveness of the *Kabi* type of entertainment indicated a motley audience, clientele and patronage, i.e. a certain amorphousness of cultural grouping in terms of social groups. The composition by caste and community of a representative group of versifiers in Calcutta from the late 18th to the early 19th century is significant, especially in the context of the urban litterateurs emerging from the educated middle class. In any representative group of versifiers such names are likely to occur: Anthony Feringhee (Luso-Indian or Indo-Portuguese), Bhola Moira (confectioner by caste), Nime Sunri (liquor distiller by caste), Bhabani Banik (spice merchant by caste), Ram Basu (Kayastha or writer by caste), Haru Thakur (Brahmin), Kesta Muchi (cobbler by caste), Nitai Bairagi (Baisnab mendicant).<sup>29</sup> And in any representative group of litterateurs of the later period, roughly from 1840, there is absolute domination of the high castes, new education and new professions.

A gulf separated the two streams; the older stream, flowing like a torrent for about half a century, lost itself in the faintly identifiable channels of tradition, while the new stream, controlled from the source, was taking a sedate linear course. A solitary individual sought to bridge the gulf.

<sup>28</sup> Rabindranath Tagore in "Lokasahitya", *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Centenary edition, vol. 13, pp. 709-10.

<sup>29</sup> S. K. De, *History of Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta, 1919, p. 318.

In mid-19th century, Iswar Gupta, the Bengali language journalist and versifier—lively, spontaneous and mordantly witty—collected fragments of biography still available about the exponents of the earlier tradition.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, he inspired the younger generation of litterateurs who became prominent in the late 19th century. But the gulf was unbridgeable. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the highly intellectual litterateur, deeply familiar with the classical tradition, moralist but intellectually honest, expressed his appreciation of Iswar Gupta's spontaneity. But he said clearly that a poet like him—a genuine Bengali—need not be born again.<sup>31</sup>

It was actually much later, almost towards the end of the nineteenth century, again within a landlord-dominated leisurely cultural set-up, that a part of the traditional musical and vocalist tradition was retrieved, but still with a pronounced tinge of reaction against the effervescence and social laxity of the old tradition. It was not till the early twentieth century that a systematic assessment of the late 18th and early 19th century tradition of cultural entertainment was sought to be made. A modern literary critic presented the following assessment of *Kabi* poetry early in this century.<sup>32</sup>

“... Kabi poetry cannot be regarded merely as a belated product of the Baisnab School [as part of the Hooghly-Bhagirathi cultural tradition referred to earlier], although in a distant way it attempted to carry on the older tradition. It is not music yearning like a god in pain. Higher flights of poetry were unsuited to its hard and narrow environment; the rambling life of its votaries stored their minds with little learning and culture; they indulged in metrical exercises partly as the means of earning a livelihood under the patronage of the isolated aristocracy of the priests and the princes (old rajas or zamindars), of the plain democracy of

<sup>30</sup> The writings of Iswar Gupta on the subject are edited by Bhabotosh Datta in *Kabijibani*, Calcutta, 1958.

<sup>31</sup> *Bankim Granthabali*, Bibidha, Sahitya Parisad, Calcutta, p. 347. •

<sup>32</sup> S. K. De, op. cit., pp. 335-37.

poor peasants in the remote villages [referring to the earlier phase], and of the respectable middle class of thrifty merchants and banians in the crowded cities. Though the roar of the cannon at Plassey and Udayanala was but heard faintly by them . . . yet the latter half of the 18th century with its confused energy, diffused culture and political, social and mental chaos did not demand nor could inspire literature of great value. There was hardly any desire for serious writing; what was wanted were trifles capable of affording excitement, pleasure and song. . . . But in spite of their drawbacks and difficulties, Kabi poetry in its best aspect is an entirely homespun product . . . capable of awakening and keeping popular enthusiasm and possessing simplicity and liquidity of utterance, which draws its bones and thews and sinews from the language and ideas of the people themselves who begot them and with whose central life force they have an unconscious and spontaneous rapport.

" . . . They succeeded very often in piercing through the gauds and trimmings of an effete literary tradition. . . . Although universal popular appreciation . . . is not the true test of poetic merit such popular valuation is not to be wholly rejected as a false index by the pedantry of cultural criticism."

## V

Even if one does not agree wholly with this assessment of *Kabi* poetry, this might serve as a means of appreciating the complexity of *babu* culture, which has generally aroused a high degree of moral indignation or a sense of comic fun in the generations following its decline.

With all his attachment to Grecian columns, western fineries and playthings, the *babu* was a native. As an aristocrat his genuflexion before the ruling authority was all of a piece with the attitude of vassals anywhere in the world. But much of his role was played out by the 1840s, though the need for his patronage never quite withered away at least in the realm of urban colour. The *Kabi* poetry almost

fell down the precipice with the relative decline of the *babu's* role in urban society.

The new urban elite's growing national self-respect went almost hand in hand with emulating the Englishmen in their language and sophistication. The *babu's* servility and his code of honour could both appear incomprehensible to the new elite. But the *babu*, especially in the forties and fifties, could also look upon his successor as a prig or a solemn schoolboy. At his best the *babu* could rival his successor with his earthy sense of fun and a deeply traditional linguistic and musical equipment. As late as the mid-19th century one of their best specimens could laugh at his own society in the raciest possible local dialect and organise at the same time a Bengali translation of the *Mahabharata* in a style and manner appropriate to the epic.<sup>33</sup> Grovelling in the open sewers of Calcutta in a state of high intoxication was not necessarily the only prominent feature of *babu* culture.

The origin and development of *akhrai*<sup>34</sup> (sedentary singing as distinguished from the peripatetic recital of the versifiers) bear out the organic links within the *babu* culture. Originating in the textile-producing cultural and religious centre of Santipur, a seat of traditional urbanism on the river Bhagirathi in the early 18th century, the *akhrai* type of singing spread to other centres of less traditional origin on the Bhagirathi-Hooghly channel, the Dutch colony of Chinsura near Hooghly, for example, and from there to the nascent metropolis of Calcutta in the late 18th century. In the process of transmission *akhrai* songs developed a complexity of rhythm and music and a certain lyrical-devotional dimension over the original base of free adulterous references.

The Chinsura group of singers set an unprecedented example by using twenty-two instruments including earthen pots and buckets during their visits to Calcutta in the late

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter V, section V of this book for some translated excerpts from Kaliprasanna Sinha's work *Hutum Panchar Naksha* (1862).

<sup>34</sup> Iswar Gupta traces the origin and development of *Akhrai* type of song in *Sangbad Probhakar* (1853). For excerpts, see N. Chakrabarti, *Urta-bingsa Satabdir Kabiwala* . . . , Calcutta, 1958, pp. 22-29.

18th century. By that time several singing groups had emerged in different localities of Calcutta. The musical contests between different singing groups used to be held, among other places, in the garden of a Khatri (north-Indian) merchant of Calcutta.

The opulent families of Calcutta became increasingly involved in the combat performance of the groups supported by them. The Sobhabazar Raj family took a deep interest in new adaptations and experiments and, under the patronage of Maharaja Nabakrishna, the *akhrai* type of singing acquired a new look. A further transformation occurred with the arrival of Nidhu Babu (d. 1838), the unrivalled maestro of the genre in the early 19th century.<sup>35</sup> He infused new depth and sophistication into *akhrai* songs. Later in Nidhu Babu's life, the highly complex *akhrai* type of singing was broken up into "*hapakhrai*" or quasi-*akhrai* by one of Nidhu Babu's disciples. The master was said to have disapproved at first but later on yielded to his disciple's entreaties and to popular demand.

Some of the rich dilettantes among the *babus* formed a group called "The Birds."<sup>36</sup> They prided themselves in their capacity to float in the air under the impulse of smoking the grass. They assembled in a large thatched hut, built in the traditional fashion to accommodate gatherings of people. It was owned by a banian to an American ship captain. This banian used to have great fun with the group of "birds." A high degree of virtuosity was ensured by the presence of Nidhu Babu. Admission into the charmed circle was rigorously controlled. There is a story about a person who, seeking membership, sat with the "birds" and puffed at the pipe of grass a hundred times, but that once he slightly coughed and thus got the name of "a third rate bird". Rup-

<sup>35</sup> S. K. De, op. cit., pp. 391-408, Bhabotosh Datta, op. cit., pp. 100-31.

<sup>36</sup> *Sangbad Probhakar*, June, 1854, describes "The Birds" in vivid language. For specimens of songs of this group, see *Sangitrasokallol*, as quoted in Benoy Ghosh, *Sangbadpatre Banglar Samajchitra*, vol. 4, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 841-964. Dr. Arun Bose of Rabindra Bharati University offered some useful suggestions on the musical tradition of 18th and 19th century Bengal.

chand Das, originally from Orissa, became the most famous of the "birds", earning a great reputation for comic verses and songs. He was adept at mixing English words with Bengali. Like the *Kabi* songsters, however, he combined frivolity with an occasional flow of spontaneous poetry. Indeed, in one respect, the songsters, the "birds", and the greatest singer-composers of the time, Nidhu Babu and Sri-dhar Kathak, represented different facets of one *babu* culture, perhaps also the different moods of the *babu*, who could be a rake or a connoisseur, or both.

The *babu* survived by a manipulation of rent and interest.<sup>37</sup> He was after all not so uniquely degenerate. Yet he left a vacuum. His culture suffered from a lack of clearly marked means of transmission. He failed to establish direct communication with the emerging groups and thus at least one positive element in his culture—the native colloquial thrust, represented, it may be said somewhat symbolically, by the broad but confident strokes of Calcutta's bazar paintings<sup>38</sup> in the 19th century—was apparently lost. He himself became progressively obsessed with manner and style, perhaps as a defensive reaction. In the northern quarter of Calcutta, in the highly insulated urban locales, such manner and style could spread and be almost ossified among a broad mass of people. Many years later a stranger to the city was to describe the natives of Calcutta in a not too detached way.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix III—"Estates of Some Opulent Families of Calcutta".

<sup>38</sup> W. G. Archer, *Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta*, London, 1953. The book contains some illustrations of Kalighat *pat* or painting.

<sup>39</sup> "Since at least one-half of every mother's son is woman, the men of Calcutta also approximated to this type. In any case, among the natives of the city, bones and bony effects were considered to be very unbecoming in a man.... The heavier French beauties at the court of Louis XIV offered quite close parallels to the Calcutta type [of beauty]. . . . The natives of Calcutta had also a very quick sense of humour. The slightest suggestion of the comic in any person or situation never escaped them and no sly dig was lost on them." Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, Berkeley, 1968, pp. 366-67.

## CHAPTER V

# Daily Life in Old Calcutta

An outsider having arrived in Calcutta is conversing with a very well-informed person of the city about the style of life in Calcutta. He admits that he suffers under the stigma of being a yokel and pleads that he would be forever grateful to the wise urbanite if he helps him out of his predicament in the city.<sup>1</sup>

The wise urbanite replies that he can indeed teach the villager the manners of the city, but there are certain difficulties for which the villagers themselves are responsible.

The villager asks what those difficulties are. The urbanite replies that a villager, arriving in the city, somehow manages to find shelter in somebody's house. Living there, he moves from place to place to practise the art of conversation. He observes that at some places English is spoken, at other places Persian or Hindi; and cajoling the already established persons in the city (the fortunate ones), he cultivates "learning" (develops a linguistic equipment) free of cost and comes to be respected by many people for the style of his language, manner of dining, and deportment. Then he regularly attends on important persons and, by flattering them, manages to secure some employment. After he has made some money, he starts criticising the manner of speech and other things associated with the city.

Secondly, he agrees to do things or work on jobs which the people of the city would refuse to do, because none of his kinsmen or affines are there to criticise his deeds. Thirdly,

<sup>1</sup> The first section of this chapter, except for the last two paragraphs, is summarised from *Kalikata Kamalalaya* (Calcutta—the Abode of Goddess of Wealth) by Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyaya. The book was first published in 1823. The summary in this section is from a reprint of the book in 1936, pp. 3-10.



those jobs which are worth perhaps two hundred rupees he agrees to do for a paltry sum, and he works from 8 A.M. to 10 P.M. to please his masters. Many people in the city consider this injurious to their interests because they cannot work like that themselves.

Finally, when he grows still richer, he sets up a permanent establishment in the city and starts living with his family. But when some important occasions arise, such as marriages or Pujas, he goes to his ancestral place to celebrate them. If some neighbour or relation asks him why he does so, he argues that he cannot deviate from the example set by his ancestors and that in Calcutta one cannot really celebrate the ancestral festivals. The people of Calcutta celebrate the worship of Durga, but he ridicules it as a chandelier or illumination festival, dancing girl or wife's ornament and dress festival, etc.

"So, brother, we do not gain anything by introducing you to the style of city living", says the urbanite. "Nor do I think it reasonable when you claim that in the course of living in the city you will learn the ways of the city, since you will be humiliated because of your ignorance and will have to go back to your village."

The stranger admits that there is some truth in such allegations but denies that all people who come from villages have the same natural inclinations. Have those city-dwellers who have complaints against the villagers as a body considered the precept in the manual of ethics that the most fundamental thing about man is his natural inclination which is centred in the cerebral region. This (physiological) fact is independent of where one lives. That living in a certain place does not lead to a superior natural inclination is clearly stated in the precept that everywhere there are three kinds of men—good, bad and middling. Then how can a universal judgement be applicable to the city-dwellers or villagers as a body?

On hearing this the urbanite admits that the villager is indeed a proper person for receiving instructions in etiquette. A discreet person would not put an object in an unsuitable

container. If the container is unsuitable the object suffers. Look, it is for this reason that liquids like oil are put in earthen or glass pots while mercury is not put in any except an iron container.

The catechism now centres on the style of life of the city people. And the very first question to which the villager seeks an answer is whether the city people have deviated from normal Hindu rituals. The villager's impression is that people in the city go to work early in the morning and, spending the whole day at their places of work, return late in the evening, and after supper go straight to bed. In reply the urbanite asserts that this is not the way in which the respectable people of the city lead their lives. He then gives a detailed description of the daily life of the city people in order of their economic status.

Those who are *dewans* or *nutsuddis*, writes the author of *Kalikata Kamalalaya* (Calcutta—the Abode of the Goddess of Wealth), that is, gentlemen of means, get up early in the morning, and after washing, they spend the early part of the day in anointing their bodies with oil, in bathing and in performing the rituals of worship—making offerings, gifts, sacrifices, etc., followed by eating the day's first meal and some rest. After this they put on gorgeous dresses and go to their places of work. They come home, change and wash, purify themselves with Ganges water and, after evening worship followed by refreshments, are ready to meet people who come to visit them, or they go out visiting.

The daily life of the middle class people is almost the same except that they spend less on charity and there is less of social intercourse, and more of hard labour. The life of poorer people, the author remarks, follows the same routine, but lacks amenities like good food and dress; they cannot afford to give away money and gifts to the poor and have to struggle hard for their existence. For some are *muharis* or petty clerks, some bazar *sircars* (men in charge of big Indian or European households). They have to walk considerable distances and have to go every evening to *dewanji* to say "Yes Sir, as you please, Sir!" What else can they do? Their

livelihood depends on it. After all, the stomach has to be filled.

Those who are most fortunate lead very leisurely lives and take siestas in the afternoon, get up at 4 P.M. when some of them look into their business affairs and some listen to religious discourses such as the Puranas.

The stranger, however, alludes to the reckless habits of some anglicised gentlemen in the city—presumably of Young Bengal. The urbanite assures him that these are not the manners of gentlemen who are religious and offer gifts to Brahmins and pundits.

The stranger refers to the peculiar speech of the city people—a mixture of Bengali with English and Persian words and idioms. The urbanite justifies this habit of speech on the ground that at the back of it there is a desire for acquisition of knowledge. The urbanite would not, however, defend the use of a foreign word when there is a Bengali equivalent, merely for the sake of fashion and pedantry. He gives examples of Persian and English words used in the conversation of city people.

The urbanite then goes on to describe the way in which important ceremonies are held in Calcutta. For occasions like the *sradh* ceremony of his parents a person goes to the leader of his faction (*dalapati*) and expresses his desire to spend according to his means. The leader (*dalapati*) gets a list prepared of the future invitees—so many pure (*kulin*) Brahmins related to the faction, so many partially pure (*bhanga kulin*) Brahmins, professors of Sanskrit seminaries (*adhyapakas*) and others. Invitations are sent out according to that list. The people invited ask for the leader's permission before they attend the function. The leader always arrives rather late. People keep waiting for him. Seminarians discuss the niceties of the *sastras*, the *kulins* keep sitting round the *gosthipati* (head of the sub-caste). The *bhattas* or the genealogical reciters extol the pedigree of the host and his virtues. The entrance to the *sabha* (place of meeting) is guarded by door-keepers who use their hands and legs to prevent the entry of any but the invited groups. The *dala-*

*pati* arrives at that juncture in royal grandeur in the company of his closest relatives and friends. All present in the *sabha* rise to welcome him with various respectful exclamations. The *dalapati* takes a conspicuous seat in the *sabha* and after an interval, makes inquiries whether this person or that person has arrived. The host most humbly submits before the leader that the day (or the night) is quite advanced. If permitted, he will present to the invited guests garlands and sandal paste. The leader asks the host to go to the *gosthipati*. There is some discussion about precedence which is settled by the leader. After the *gosthipati* receives the sandal paste mark from a Brahmin priest, the Brahmins in the *sabha* receive it, followed by the *dalapati*. The guests then dine within their permitted groups. The *dalapati* then fixes the amount of the gift to be given to each person. The host presents the gifts with due honour.

This description of city life in *Kalikata Kamalalaya* by the most prominent scholarly mediator of the orthodox faction in Calcutta is moulded strongly by a materialistic and mediating outlook. In his general description of Calcutta he compares Calcutta to the sea. On great occasions streams of money flow away from Calcutta and rivers of money constantly move into the city. There are various kinds of learning and types of scholars who are like jewels in the sea bed. During the conflict of the English with the Nawabs of Bengal, Calcutta was churned up, and from this churning deadly poison as well as delightful ambrosia issued forth, and this has made Calcutta unparalleled and famous throughout the world. Many envious sharks live here, talking ill of others, and many crocodiles in the form of illiterates are around swimming about. The Goddess of Wealth is ever present and at her sight the God Narayana has also decided to be here as the idol of the city, bringing with him his impetuous horses causing lively movement and justifying the definition of the city as the Abode of the Goddess of Wealth.

It is not unlikely that the same writer who was the editor of *Samachar Chandrika*, the journal of the orthodox party in Calcutta in the early thirties, has described the daily life

of one of the richest men in the city. Writing the obituary notice of Raja Sibchandra Roy of a gold-merchant family, prominent in urban real estate ownership in Calcutta, he describes his daily life.<sup>2</sup>

“From daybreak to the time of ablution he used to have edifying conversations with preceptors, priests, Brahmins and Baisnabs. And that was also the time when he distributed gifts. After the mid-day meal he used to look into the the affairs of the estate in the company of his office employees. Late afternoon was the time for visits by his friends and relatives. At nightfall he usually played some game (probably of dice) and amused himself with singers, magicians, buffoons, sycophants and various other light-hearted companions. Many people were dependent on the Raja. Apart from people engaged by him for estate management—his *dewans*, accountants and clerks—there were many who used to get monthly allowances from him and all that they did was to present themselves before the Raja towards the day’s end.” (The writer concludes that the death of a person like him causes indescribable sorrow.)

## II

The above descriptions are coloured by the strong ritualistic and materialistic bias of the author who tunes up his narratives to a high pitch. A more down-to-earth picture of the life style of an old and well-to-do Bengali, the Old Baboo, is given by a European observer in a patronizing tone.<sup>3</sup> The Old Baboo, described by the observer, is undoubtedly the founder of a family. Such families probably grew progressively poorer, or progressively wilder in their manner and way of life—poorer when they increased in geometrical progression leaving little but the barest means of subsistence

<sup>2</sup> *Samachar Chandrika*, December 8, 1827, quoted in B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*, Calcutta, 1956, pp. 243-44.

<sup>3</sup> The second section of the chapter contains excerpts from Mawson, *A Few Local Sketches*, 1846, pp. 97-115.

for later generations; wilder when they did not increase fast enough, leaving enough resources for survivors or adopted sons.

Nilcomul Bysack, a significant though fictitious name used by the European observer to describe the life style of an old man of a Bengali trading caste, had been a money-lender ever since he had capital to lend.

"He has been no wild speculator risking his idolized rupees on the state of foreign markets and the faith of foreign merchants. He once and once only made a shipment on his own account. But from the moment he invested his funds in saltpetre till that in which he received his account sales, he lived in tortures of suspense for which the clear profit of one hundred and seven rupees, five annas, nine pies on the five thousand invested scarcely compensated. Since that time he had kept steadily to the safe and profitable occupation of lending money on the best securities. Mortgages of house and land with unexceptionable *puttahs* (title deeds), Company's papers, jewels or even the note of hand of a responsible man, are things which may console even a miser for a temporary separation from a portion of his money, especially when well assured that it will in due time return to him with increase. By such safe and profitable dealings and by rigid economy in the management of his funds, Nilcomul Bysack has become a rich man. The exact amount of his wealth is, of course, impossible to state, but as it is generally said to be ten lakhs, we may, according to the rule in such cases, safely suppose it to be five.

"Deep in those recesses of the Black Town where a white face is a thing to scare children with, stands the mansion of that branch of the Bysack family of which Nilcomul is the head. It is of the kind of which there are so many specimens in those regions. Outwardly a square donjon-keep like erection of dark-red brick, with a turret at one corner; inwardly it exhibits two or three tiers of wooden galleries surrounding an open quadrangular court. It is, like most of Hindu family mansions, populous as a rabbit warren. As but a portion of its inhabitants we may reckon up the Baboo and his wife,

his five sons and their five wives, his three daughters and their three husbands, with a matter of about twenty grandchildren. Over this community Nilcomul reigns with patriarchal sway. At his expense all its members live. Other and larger communities have to support their rulers, but here the case is reversed.

"... Nilcomul who has grown rich, as much by saving as by gaining, and who practically recognises the truth of the maxim, 'If you would be well served, serve yourself!', generally begins the day by acting as caterer for the household which subsists at his cost. With the coadjutancy of the old lady his wife, he forms a committee of supply, in which it is determined what provisions are required for the consumption of the day. This delicate point being settled, he summons Buloram his servant to attend him with basket and bag, and attired in soiled *dhootie* and *chudder* (the *chapkhan* he dispensed with on such occasions), and thrusting his toes into his oldest slippers, he sallies forth on a foraging expedition. On his way to the bazar (Lalla Baboo's is his favourite resort) he makes a point of enquiring at the shops which he passes the current prices of oil, *ghee*, spices, etc., etc. This is not from idle curiosity. He thereby secures himself against the possibility of being cheated by his servant to whom he is obliged to entrust the purchase of such articles."

After other details, the observer goes on to describe the way in which the old man spends the evening.

"Now comes the period of enjoyment for the Old Baboo. His religious exercises being disposed of, he establishes himself in a *boitakkhana* or sitting-room and prepares to receive company. The apartment is a somewhat confined one on the ground floor. It is furnished with a *tukht-posh* (a platform, something like the dais of old) over which is spread a *sutrin-gee* (a bedspread) and about which are scattered eight or ten large pillows. The room is lit by two or three dim lamps in old-fashioned wall-shades and is adorned with pictorial representations of the incarnations of Vishnu. Seating himself in an easy *dishabille* on the platform, Nilcomul, in the full enjoyment of *otium cum dignitate*, welcomes his

favoured guests as they drop in, one after another, 'quite promiscuously'. There is Gossainjee, the spiritual adviser; and Buttacharjee, the family priest, and other Brahmins and Bustoms, steady, old-fashioned people like himself. Their conversation partakes in a great measure of a religious character. They bewail the heresy and corruption of the rising generation and comfort and encourage each other in their adherence to the doctrines and customs of their ancestors, which must be good because they are so old. Amongst other things, Nilcomul expresses his regret that he had been so far left to himself as to allow some of his boys to attend the Hindu College. He had indeed withdrawn them when he found they were acquiring infidel notions, but it was too late, the poison had begun to operate. His friends shut their eyes and shake their heads and condole with him; and he finds consolation in their pity. Meantime, the *hookah*, their sole refreshment, has been rapidly circulating and aiding, by its gentle inspiration, their sober converse. At an early hour the friends retire and then and not till then, Nilcomul takes his solitary supper. As at breakfast, so now, the old woman attends him, to see his wants supplied and to furnish him with a report of all that has passed during the day—the quarrel of the young women, the combats and insolence of the children."

The observer thus winds up his narrative of the daily life of the old man.

"Not having for several years had any business requiring a fixed office and establishment of his own, Nilcomul is generally to be found, during business hours, at the shop of the son whom he has established in trade, or in the cash-office of the Agency House to which another acts as Banyan. In one of these places he may usually be seen, keeping a watchful eye on all that is going on, suggesting, advising, instructing with the confidence of one who has gathered knowledge from experience; the anxious zeal of one deeply interested and the authoritative manner of one who has a right to interfere in all that is said or done there. Business is to him the chief of pleasures and he will retire from it only



when he retires from life. It has been shown already that he is one of the most orthodox of Hindoos but whether the perfect repose of the heaven to which his religion teaches him to aspire would be the species of bliss most congenial to his nature, is at least doubtful. Certainly, it is hard to imagine him finding happiness in an Elysium without a currency. . . .”

In describing the phenomenon of the New Baboo the European observer continues: “. . . A young man of modest mien arose to address the Assembly [the assembly of educated young men at the Fouzdari Balakhana in Chitpore Road, as mentioned earlier in the book]. He was a smallish, well-shaped youth with regular features, large softly brilliant eyes and small moustache. His dress was the usual closely fitting white muslin upper garment or surcoat reaching from neck to ankle with a white scarf hanging gracefully over one shoulder. The two extremes of the man, the head and the feet, were respectively covered by a neatly folded white turban and a pair of European fashioned shoes.

“It was the Young Baboo, Rajchunder Roy! and thus he spoke: ‘My friends and fellow-countrymen! After the eloquent and impassioned harangues with which we have been favoured by our talented, celebrated and distinguished visitor and the other able orators who have preceded me in addressing you, it will be unpardonable presumption in a humble individual like myself to consume too many of your valuable moments with my crude observations on the subject (cries of ‘no! go on!’ and cheers)—the great, the important subject which now so powerfully occupies our consideration. But my friends, as a sincere but humble well-wisher of our beloved and unhappy country, I cannot refrain from speaking a few words (‘hear! hear!’). Our country! oh! my dear friends, how our hearts bound in our bosoms with an unquenchable flame when we hear that glorious sound (thunders of applause). How unworthy of that country would we not be, did we not unanimously and with one consent, erect our voices to exclaim for the long procrastinated redress of her wrongs. No! my friends and fellow-

countrymen, let us all combine in our undivided endeavour ('hear! hear!' and cheers)—which must then be crowned with a successful result—to procure and obtain Justice for India!!' (boisterous cheering).

"The young Baboo sat down amidst the reiterated plaudits of his hearers. His speech, as the reader of the above verbatim report thereof will allow, was well worthy of their admiration. The orator is in truth one of the great gems of the Hindoo community. It is not from his family connections that he is honoured among them, for on that point, being the son of a China Bazar shop-keeper, he has no reason to boast. It is not his wealth, or his station, which gives him influence among his countrymen, for he is but a humble *keranee* (clerk) in a public office. His is the power, the influence of genius and knowledge and of these only; but armed therewith he can afford to laugh at the empty dignity of men who write themselves *bahadoor*.

"Rajchunder Roy was first introduced to our notice about five years ago. It was at an examination of the students, or, as they like to be called, alumni of the Hindu College, held in the Hall of the Government House. There was a gay gathering of all classes of the community, European and Native, to do honour to the occasion. A youth, to whom had been awarded the prize for a well-written essay, astonished the company by the manner in which he recited 'The Speech of Lord Chatham on the American War'. It was Rajchunder Roy, then a very young Baboo of sixteen or thereabouts. With not a particle of that *mauvaise honte* which under similar circumstances would have disfigured the performance of many an English student, he stood forth, cool, possessed and self-reliant, and in full silvery tones 'spoke the speech trippingly on the tongue' suiting at the same time 'the action to the word' most gracefully. A strange thing it was to hear and see a swart-faced Indian boy in a green and gold turban and brocaded vest, pouring forth with a seemingly earnest energy and with faultless intonation, the words of the great English statesman.

"Rajchunder's prize essay, already alluded to, was 'On

the Best Means of Ameliorating the Condition of Hindoo Females'. We are sorry that we are unable to present extracts which might give the reader an idea of its merits as a literary composition. But we can conscientiously assure him that these were neither few nor inconsiderable. It included a review of the condition of the softer sex in various countries and communities from the days of our 'general mother' Eve, to those of our gracious Queen Victoria. And it showed indisputably that where woman was neglected or degraded, man was little better than a barbarian; and that, on the contrary, where the fair enjoyed their legitimate influence, civilisation reigned. The essayist then proceeded to combat most triumphantly the prejudice, common to Old Weller and the Hindoos, against marrying widows, old or young. And he introduced with thrilling effect the novel and appropriate quotation

'The world was sad—the garden was a wild!—  
And man, the hermit, sigh'd—till woman smil'd!'

"We have seen that ere our young Baboo had left school, he had won fame as an essayist. Though he has since then become distinguished among his modernised countrymen as a poet and an orator, he does not yet scorn to employ his genius and his pen on humble prose. The young Baboos of Calcutta have now for several years been formed into a 'Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge'.<sup>4</sup> Of course, Rajchunder Roy is a member. We have now before us one of several printed volumes of essays and lectures, chiefly in English, which have from time to time been read to and by its members at their monthly meetings. And we may safely declare that, on the whole, both in style and matter, the volume would do honour to a society composed of an equal number of educated British youth. There are

<sup>4</sup> For specimens of essays and composition of Young Bengal see Proceedings of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge as collected and edited by Goutam Chattopadhyay in *Awakening in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1965, vol. I. See also reports on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1836-43, Bengal Fort William General, Calcutta Committee, 6 volumes, in which were published the prize essays of each year.

dissertations on literature, science, history, topography, the social condition of the Hindoos, etc., which as the genuine production of Hindoo youths writing in a strange tongue are truly wonderful. To this volume, Rajchunder Roy has contributed a treatise, 'On the benefits to be derived from the introduction of European implements and modes of operation in the Arts and Manufactures of India'. A very interesting practical subject and very ably handled. May we hint to the members of the 'Bengal British India Society' that if by circulating a Bengalee translation of Rajchunder's essay among their poorer countrymen they could make them discontented with their tools, it would be conferring upon them the benefit quite as great as that of making them discontented with their rulers.

"It can hardly be expected that a youth so gifted as our young Baboo has been shown to be can be a very orthodox Hindoo. He is in truth considered by his relations as a lost non-conformist; and even the wife of his bosom holds him as little better than a heretic. He cannot make up his mind to worship an image of mud, however finely bedizened or even to pray to the sacred stream of Gunga. He is, moreover, too apt to esteem men according to their characters, to be willing to yield that blind veneration to the Brahmins, which the faith of his fathers imperatively demands. It is, however, more for sins of omission than of commission that he is condemned. He neglects the ceremonies enjoined on all pious Hindoos, it is true, but he still retains (slightly modified) their dress and manner of living. He does not horrify his family by indulging in forbidden meats or drinks and in all social and domestic relations he is, to the full, as irreproachable as the most orthodox members of the Dhurma Subha.

"Notwithstanding that our friend is so little of a Hindoo in religion, the 'fasts [feasts?] and festivals' which that religion enjoins are to him seasons of delight to which he looks forward with longing anticipation. It is, however, only those which are 'holidays at the public offices' which he thus honours. Then if he be idly disposed, he can devote a long

day to novel reading, or to musing over some favourite poet; or if actively inclined he can astonish and alarm his 'woman-kind' by surprising experiments in chemistry and electricity. Of late he has been in a state of great excitement on the subject of Mesmerism, which puzzles and perplexes him exceedingly. He was at first inclined to laugh at it; but the lately imported notices of its successful exhibitions have almost overcome his incredulity. His own experiments in the supposed science have not, however, as yet tended to confirm his belief in it. The recently developed wonders of Galvanism and Photography, in all its branches, have made a great impression on his mind. And the first thing he looks for in the Express Extra is tidings of the Aerial, of the success of which he is beginning to be somewhat doubtful. The great delight of his life is to meet with some well-informed European, who is able and willing to talk about such things. . . ."

The European observer ends on a very patronising note but he is shrewd in observation and concludes that the type of youth he has described is one which he appreciates most and that there are many other types too, "the drunken young Baboos", "the licentious young Baboos", "the sporting young Baboos" and "extravagant and immoral young Baboos". The old Baboos were likely to have been of different types too, though he did not mention the types of the people of the older generation. From internal evidence, especially from his reference to the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, it is clear that his description applies to the late thirties and the early forties of the nineteenth century.

### III

As the new generation described by the European observer grew into maturity its experience must have been varied. Probably a commonplace example of its experience would be the "Reminiscences of a Keranee's Life". Writing in 1873, a middle-aged man—he was forty-eight when he was writ-

ing—thus described his transition into adulthood:<sup>5</sup>

“Raw from school with the melodious warblings of D.L.R. [David Lester Richardson who taught poetry and Shakespeare at the Hindu Metropolitan College] still rumbling in his brains, what has the young man to do to commence with? Of course he could start a newspaper or a magazine . . . , or better still he could write books for the edification of man in general . . . , or he might become a pedagogue. . . . All these appeared to him to be quite easy and feasible. . . . But Papa shook his head, and said ‘nay’ to every brilliant idea as it cropped up and the upshot was that at the age of eighteen I joined the respectable firm of Smasher, Mutton and Co., as an apprentice.

“I appeared before Mr. Pigeon, the Managing Clerk of the firm of Smasher, Mutton and Co., and made as stiff a *salaam* [salute] as any Young Bengal has rendered either before or after. . . . What did I know? What would I wish to learn? Did I understand accounts? Did I know what a ledger was? Could I docket a letter or draft a reply? . . . They were all Greek to me; I had learnt English but no Greek; I had never come across such uncouth words as ‘ledger’, ‘docket’ or ‘draft’.

“With smiling helplessness Mr. Pigeon made me over to his head Baboo Kinorram Chuckerbutty to make of me what he could and with supercilious contempt the Baboo told me to mend his pens. Was Young Bengal to submit to this? Shades of Bacon, Addison and Johnson! Was the student who kept company with you so long and pored over your pages night and morning now to mend the pens of an old *keranee*? Was the first day of my apprenticeship to be signalised by a revolt? . . .

“Behold me six months after [he had earlier stated that he had got a job in a government office] seated behind the counter of the Government treasury—this time no longer

<sup>5</sup> *Mukherjee's Magazine* (1873), pp. 394-98. The “Reminiscences” may remind us of a Japanese nursery rhyme: “From out of the West/in flew the civilization and enlightenment bird/Nesting in the chair tree/he sang salary! salary!” Of course, the Japanese experience was ultimately quite different.

an apprentice, but hedged with all the dignity that appertains to a paid servant of the Government.

“What a grand sight for a young inexperienced man of eighteen; Rupees scattered on all sides in delirious confusion. And the sound—chink, chink, chink. Talk of the music of the spheres: What is it? What can it be, compared to the music of gold *mohurs* and rupees? . . . How the sound rang in my ears even in my sleep. For days, weeks and months it haunted me as a pleasing fancy . . ., till by everyday repetition it lost its charms, ceased to please and ultimately became absolutely annoying. . . .”

#### IV

At its highest level of material success the Young Bengal could move into the Establishment and develop into the new type of association man that a person like Digambar Mitra (later Raja Digambar Mitra) actually became. *The Hindoo Patriot* thus writes about him on his death in 1879.<sup>6</sup>

“When he left the [Hindu] college, he was well grounded in English literature, mathematics and metaphysics. He first entered the Government Service as an Ameen [revenue surveyor] and worked for some years under Mr. Russell, the collector of Moorshedabad. Mr. Russell was an Indian Nabob of the olden type, did very little work himself and as he found Digumber very intelligent and useful he left almost the whole of his office to him. It was here [that] Digumber laid the basis of that accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the revenue system for which he afterwards became famous. But he did not remain long in this office. He was invited by the family of Raja Kissennath (a leading zamindar of Bengal) to be his private tutor. . . . On Kissennath’s attaining majority he practically became the manager of his vast estates. Raja Kissennath presented his old tutor the munificent sum of a lakh of rupees as a reward for his services. With this lakh of rupees in hand Digumber launched upon

<sup>6</sup> *The Hindoo Patriot*, Supplement, April 21, 1879.

business to try his fortune. He tried his hand at indigo planting, [at] silk filature and [at] stock jobbing successively but in all these branches of business he lost his fortune with the same rapidity with which he made it. . . . He had reverses in business till he resolved to wash his hands off and to invest whatever he had in zamindary estates. . . . Without any patrimony he acquired landed property, which now yields an annual income of about three-fourths of a lakh of rupees. . . . The secret of this success as a zamindar being in the thorough personal supervision (unlike the practice in some relatively old families) of all matters connected with the management of his estates. . . . Although not a lawyer by profession he was one by instinct (and he often pleaded his own cases). . . .”

Digambar was a rare example of Young Bengal, spouting Shakespeare and Bacon and at the same time turning out a thoroughly practical and successful zamindar. He was tenacious of his rights, but at the same time he was not hard upon his tenants. He would take the uttermost farthing, which the law gave him, but he would not kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

“Digumber was early inducted into public life; while yet in his teens he was thrown into [association with] the illustrious Dwarkanath Tagore. . . . The Tagores have been the intellectual leaders of Bengal from the time of the resuscitation of the national life under the auspices of British rule and civilisation and Digumber, by his close and intimate association with the Tagores, became one of them in habit, thought and spirit. On the establishment of the British Indian Association Digumber was its first Assistant Secretary and ultimately became the honoured president. In early life he mixed more with the non-official than with the official Europeans. . . . His first appearance in public was in connection with so-called Black Act Meeting of 1856. . . . In 1864 we believe he was returned by the British Indian Association on the invitation of Government as its representative in the Epidemic Fever Commission [by that time he had become a Justice of the Peace and Honorary Magistrate



for Calcutta and a visitor of the Wards' Institution, according to this biographical notice].

"He used to say that while the Government spent twelve millions of money [rupees] on soldiers' barracks for the sake of the health of the European soldiers, it could not expend one thousandth part of that amount for the salvation of the lives of the Queen's lieges in India and that our Government claimed a character for benevolence, paternal solicitude for the welfare of the people and for Christian charity."

## V

Detached from the world of eloquence in English and the establishment, a highly individualistic aristocrat of Calcutta was weaving what he called "The Embroidery by a Big Owl",<sup>7</sup> aiming at nothing less than depicting the *tableaux vivants* of daily life in Calcutta. The *Naksha* (or Embroidery) is a classic composition in the colloquial Calcutta dialect of Bengali and takes the form of a satire, though the author claims that it is only a mirror (the satirical tone probably comes inevitably with the characteristic slant of colloquial Bengali in Calcutta).

One of the butts of his satire appears to have been Raja Digambar Mitra whom he describes as a Big Boast Mitra (this is the approximate meaning of the Bengali word used in the book), who according to the author serves his country by serving himself. This might be an oblique reference to a certain exclusiveness combined with a drive for personal advancement through British and elitist connections not unexpected in the self-made men of the once Young Bengal.

In a portraiture of men of established opulent families the author of the *Naksha* describes the watchmen at the entrances to the houses of rich people. Even if the Raja of Nadia, the foremost nobleman of Bengal, presents himself at the entrance to one of these houses, the watchmen will

<sup>7</sup> Kaliprasanna Sinha, *Hutum Panchar Naksha*, first edition, 1867, reprint 1956.

not move to inform their master. To win their hearts is difficult even if you pay them tips for every conceivable festival. There are some opulent men in the city who can be approached even by their creditors after an elaborate process of obtaining the Huzur's (His Great Presence) permission. The opulent men of the city cannot be blamed for this situation. The Brahmin pundits, the *umedars* or candidates for jobs, people smitten by the "daughter" calamity (expenses for daughters' weddings), unwed or alien Brahmins, constantly pester the opulent men. In the motley crowd it is difficult to ascertain, even on the strength of an affidavit, who is really in distress. The Huzur reclines on a cushion placed on a high mattress. His body is bare. By his side the *munshi* or chief clerk is consulting the *peshkar* or law assistant. In front of them there are a number of account books and a basketful of other papers. On the other side four or five Brahmin pundits are seeking the opportunity to please the *babu* by describing him as "rarely born on earth" or "disturbed in eternal meditation". About ten yards away from the *babu* are seated a couple of unemployed suppliants for jobs and an old man seeking help for his daughter's marriage. They are wearing the appropriate miserable expressions for such occasions. The sycophants are moving about bare-bodied, some are whispering into the ears of the Huzur.

It appears from the way the author develops his narrative that the opulent men described above are more representative of the past generations than of the present. "These people were not preoccupied as they are today [the author continues] with the British Indian Association, addresses, meetings and the printing press." Then almost everybody had a concubine and sycophants. The custom of maintaining sycophants had gone out of use among opulent men of the upper castes. The rich men of the older generation used to wake up from sleep in the middle of the day. The ritual of worship was on a grand scale, taking no less than two to three hours. Massaging with oil took at least four hours. The sound of massaging resembled that of an earthquake.

During this time, the *babu* went through business matters, putting his signatures and seals on papers. The sun went down the horizon soon after he had finished washing after the meal. The landlords among the *babus* often sat up till two o'clock in the morning in their zamindari management offices; some indulged in musical soirées, debated the issues of social factionalism, and were inflated with the flattery of the sycophants. A singer or a fiddler was sure to endear himself to the *babu* and used to get tips even if he had abused the *babu* as part of the fun. But men of gentle background (*bhadrolok*) could hardly get access. They had to go through the whole range of the protocol—the barriers of the flimsy swords of the minions. For some *babus* the day was night and the night day. Since the days of Rammohan Roy, Gopi Mohan Deb, Gopimohan Tagore and Dwarkanath Tagore, these practices had started disappearing. The first newspaper of the Bengalis, *Samachar Chandrika*, began to be published. The Brahmo Samaj was founded. To oppose it the Dharma Sabha began its sittings. The practice of self-immolation of widows was abolished. David Hare made his appearance before the public. The Hindu College was founded.

From this description it appears that the author was tracing a change in the life style of the upper strata of people in the city in the late twenties and the thirties of the 19th century. To some extent the older life style still persisted among rich men of the mercantile castes. Here follows a description of such a man.

Birkrishna Dan, adopted son of Kebalchand Dan, has a business establishment at Hatkhola. He owns several dumps of goods and has five godowns of timber and lime. An amount of ten to twelve lakhs of rupees is kept in cash or invested in direct purchases. He occasionally deals in Company's papers (Government promissory notes). He has a carriage, a red waler horse, a concubine, two sycophants of his own caste and a garden in the immediate suburb. Birkrishna has a deep brown complexion and a paunch, and he wears a gold amulet and waist chain. Every day he takes

a dip in the Ganges without neglecting to have marks of sandal paste on the forehead, neck and ear. He can sign in English and can use words like "come" and "go" while dealing with English customers. Dan does not like to bother much about his business. His manager Kanaidhan Datta looks after everything. Dan spends much of his time riding his carriage, enjoying the breeze of the pulled *punkha* and playing on his *esraj* (a musical instrument).

This portraiture of life and people in Calcutta in the *Nāksha* centres primarily round the community worship of Goddess Jagaddhatri. The image of the Goddess is about 25 feet high, surrounded by equestrian models of Highlanders, images of fairies and of western women bedecked with jewels, varieties of replicas of birds, paper-pulp flowers and lotuses. The features of the Mother Goddess seem to have an Armenian or Jewish cast.

In the exhibition section there is a model of Rama seated on the royal throne (presumably after his victory over Ravana), surrounded by his demon and simian advisers and generals dressed in the garb of the banians of the city.

The exhibition of models is a devastating satire. The slant is conservative. The Young Bengal gets its share—the dining table, trousers and English jackets at the height of summer, lying drunk in ditches (city sewers) by night and "eating the moles" there, but delivering reformation (temperance?) speeches by day.

The community festival continues for several days in the Barwaritala (ground serving community purposes such as the worship of gods during festivals, operas or *yatras* on the same occasion). A typical morning during a festival is thus described.

The scavengers' carriages are moving in a row. The sweepers are pushing the carts of refuse to the Jackson Ghat on the riverside. The *bauls* (the non-conformist street singers of Bengal professing a heterodox Baisnabism) are singing the names and hymns of Krishna to the tune of cymbals at the doors of houses. The oil presser has harnessed his equipment. The *Kabi* singing (impromptu musical verse combats)

comes to an end at Barwaritala. After the *Kabi* contest the more lighthearted and youthful of the managers and spectators have left. The old and elderly stand bemused by the prospect of hearing ecstatic Baisnab lyrical songs (*kirtan*). Baisnabs of all social strata have assembled. The female singer from Simla (a northern locality of Calcutta) starts singing. Her voice is high-pitched and as metallic as a disc of bell-metal. The mellifluities from the singer's voice describing the tender pathos of Krishna's childhood cause a Baisnab *guru* to faint in ecstasy. His devotees lift him in their arms and begin to dance with abandon.

In preparation for their performance at Barwaritala, people are assembling at No. 2 Dhobapara Lane. It is a rehearsal for *hapakhrai*—popular adaptation of Nidhu Babu's highly sophisticated *akhrai* style of singing. The performers are mostly blacksmiths from Dacca, men from the castes of corn threshers and oil pressers, and gluttonous Brahmins.

It is a dark night. Occasional rumbling of clouds is heard. The earth below is emitting the heat of fire. The pedestrians are casting anxious looks at the sky and quickening their pace. The dogs are making shrill and subdued sounds. The shopkeepers are pulling down the bamboo shutters. "Gurru" (the original onomatopoetic expression in the book)—the striking of nine o'clock is announced by the blank shot of the cannon in the Fort.

Time belongs to nobody, reflects the author of the *Naksha*—it is like the current of a river, the youth of a courtesan and the life-span of living beings. The church clock strikes the hour of ten. A storm breaks. The dirt of the roads makes the darkness still darker. The rumblings of thunder and the momentary flashes of lightning make young children snuggle up in their mothers' laps. A heavy rain follows.

But in house No. 2 many people have gathered. Some are drenched. The assembly looks resplendent with all the lamps burning. The performers are waiting for the signal to begin. Some wise people have put their shoes in their pockets or are putting them under their feet. You can never trust each

other with shoes. But Palanath Babu is very late. He is one of the chief organisers of the entertainment part of the community puja festival. So long as he does not arrive the singing and music cannot begin. As soon as Palanath Babu arrives there is an uproar. The singers and their accompanists wake up to readiness. But an entire half-hour is spent in greeting one another.

Palanath Babu is a shortish and slim person, just past fifty. He is an orthodox Hindu and pretends to behave like a poor man. But he is a prince of dilettantism. In 1802 he took English lessons from Sherbourne (Sherbourne's English School was a prominent private seminary in old Calcutta) for only three months and that was his investment. He always wears formal dress and a cap. The cap is tilted at such an angle that one wonders if the *babu* has lost his right ear. The *babu* dresses in the Lucknow fashion like a faithful companion of a dancing girl. He has great prestige among the dancing girls and cultured Muslims. The Lucknowites and the Persians appreciate his gifts. The *babu* does not like the English style and considers a working knowledge of English good enough for his business. He likes the Muslim style, the talk about Nawabi manners and moods.

Now the songsters begin to sing. The whole locality of the washermen begins to vibrate. The sleeping babies in their mothers' arms get startled—the street dogs react with sounds of surprise; the washermen, fast asleep after the day's hard labour, wake up with a start and run for the assembly.

The author spends all his zest on painting the *tableaux vivants* of the city during the long and almost interminable preparation for the festivals of hook-swinging and worship of Durga. But all his zest ends on a note of evanescence. The money which he said could found several universities had been spent. Some of the organisers of the community puja and festival had ended up in a characteristic manner. Birkrishna Dan had become insolvent and had taken shelter in the French Colony near Calcutta. Palanath Babu—the highly Muhamedanized orthodox Hindu—had been carousing in a

boat with some courtesans of the city when it foundered on a sandbank during a storm and no trace of Palanath Babu could be found. He had not learnt to swim, being the son of a rich man.

## APPENDIX I

### THE MUHAMMADAN BAZAR IN BOMBAY

Another feature of Bombay Muhammadan life is the musical club, where a company of friends will meet together to pass the time in playing and singing, varying the amusement with games of cards, shatranj (draughts), *dama* and *chausar*. Occasionally the members of these clubs collect a subscription among themselves and arrange a gala night, to which friends from outside are invited, a nautch-girl being usually engaged on such occasions to give her repertoire of songs. There are again other clubs, composed of men who claim to be poets (*shair*) and who meet together to read and recite verses of their own composition. So life passes for the Muhammadans of Bombay—the days of toil pleasantly varied by festivals and fairs; and even when business is brisk and the day seems hardly long enough for the settlement of the myriad details of work, they never forget to devote a certain period of the morning and evening to prayer which is better than sleep.

Of the night side of life in the city much might be written. Wander down this street and watch the hated *hijdas* (eunuchs) clapping their hands in the manner peculiar to them. The Muhammadan shop-keeper hears them and without a word hands out a coin as a bribe to them to pass along. Thus, and in other less reputable ways, do these human anomalies earn their livelihood; for although the public shuns them as a class, they are permitted to take a part in such festivals as the Muharram and are even called in at the time of child-birth to sing songs and act as scarers of the evil spirits which are ever abroad on such occasions. The professional visionary or sight-seer is also a feature of urban life. He can throw himself at will into a kind of epileptic trance and while in that condition will answer questions as to the future which the credulous put to him. All manner of persons belonging to the lower classes visit him in his narrow attic, filled with the most pungent frankincense fumes, and for an expenditure of a few annas can obtain guidance as to their future conduct or information of what is happening in distant places. The opium-clubs of the city draw their patrons from



widely differing classes. Among the groups of four or five persons who cluster round the flame in which the opium-juice is burnt before insertion in the pipe you will find Sikh embroiderers from Lahore, Sidis from Zanzibar, Mughals from Persia, teashop-keepers, pan-sellers, hawkers, Marathas, Native Christians and men from Gujarat, for the opium-club destroys all caste prejudices and renders the votaries of "the black smoke" careless of social obligations. Perhaps the most pitiful sight of all is the streets where the women cluster like caged birds behind the bars, awaiting the meagre wage of shame. They are largely Mhars from the Deccan or Dheds from Gujarat and hold a very different and far lower position than the trained Naikins, the Marwadi, Bene-Israel and Musalman dancing-girls who live in some style in the neighbourhood of Kalbadevi road and Grant road and are engaged to sing in private houses or at public native entertainments. Many of the latter have been well grounded in Urdu and Persian classics and freely spend the comparatively large incomes which they earn by singing and dancing in charity and on religious objects. They are formed into a regular *jamat* or sisterhood, presided over by one of the older members of the class, and in addition to participating in the ordinary festivals of the faith which they profess are wont to give entertainments known as *jalsa*. . . . The life of the city at night has many strange features. In Madanpura the Sidis may be found indulging in one of the noisy revels, which constitute their only relaxation, and which have the effect of working them into a state bordering upon frenzy. They have four chief dances, which are said to be of African origin and, when properly performed, to induce the spirit of divination. They are danced to the accompaniment of a shrill pipe and quaint drums, shaped like a cannon with a parchment mouth, astride each of which members of the company sit, while the rest of the Sidi *jamat*, first men, then women, and then both sexes together, dance round them for three or four hours. At intervals a bundle of straw is lighted, and the heads of the drums are pushed into the flames to lighten up the parchment. In the middle of the dancing circle stands the Sidi *patelni* or head-woman of the tribe, now beating time to the rhythm of the music, now encouraging the dancers with loud words of approval or slapping a drummer to arouse his failing energy. As the night advances the professional shampooer or masseur commences his

rounds, uttering his peculiar cry to warn the wakeful householder that for the modest sum of four annas the wanderer will induce sleep by gently kneading the muscles. At another point one may have the echo of the luck-songs which are chanted through the livelong night on the occasion of a birth or marriage, and in yet another direction the long-drawn cry of the wandering Fakir, who begs the wherewithal to carry him to Mecca, greets the ear. During the hot season when the houses are too hot to sleep in, the pavements of the city are crowded with sheeted forms, each lying as nearly as possible with the head towards the north for fear of the anger of the Pole-star. For in the words of an old adage :

“Kibla muaf karta hai par kutb hargiz nahin!”

(The Kibla forgives, but the Pole-star never!)

From: *The Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island*, vol. I,  
Bombay, 1909, pp. 189-92.

## APPENDIX II

### THE PORT AND THE MART IN CALCUTTA

As a port, Calcutta may rank high among the great ports of the world.

The total annual tonnage is not less than 400,000 tons, and the whole of it, as currently entered and reported, is a bona fide trade, and not a mere registry of passing vessels.

The trade of the port, however, is of a mixed character, a very large proportion being carried on with Europe, and principally with the United Kingdom, while a considerable tonnage represents the commerce circulating among the Asiatic ports, locally known as the country trade.

This trade was formerly very much carried on in vessels owned by the British merchants in Calcutta; the existing owners of shipping are now a few Arab traders, whose vessels, mostly purchased from former English owners, are occupied in trade between Bengal and the ports of the Persian Gulf, the coasts of Arabia, Malabar and Mauritius, and the cotton trade between Bombay and China, the more valuable opium trade being carried on by steamers and American shipping.

The country trade with the Eastern ports of the Archipelago has of late years passed greatly into the hands of German ship-owners belonging to the Northern and Baltic ports, Bremen, Hamburg, &c. whose vessels, remaining in those ports for two or three years, have now absorbed much of this business, to the exclusion of British. The number of American ships has greatly augmented, and the foreign European traders form no inconsiderable body, but the bulk of the shipping and the most valuable and important freights are those for the United Kingdom.

With the European traders there is a great difference in the amount of goods carried out and home. The freight to India is of manufactured goods, and homewards of unmanufactured and raw materials, greatly exceeding the former in tonnage. . . .

The shipping employed in this trade has always been a boast of the British shipowner; nor is it possible that any port in the Globe can exhibit such an array of first class merchantmen, and in such condition as may be seen in this port in the cold season;

ranged generally in three tiers through the principal part of the river, and kept as if for inspection or review, in a condition most attractive to the homeward-bound passenger.

The magnitude of the internal trade of Bengal, the immense capital and population employed in the river craft, and for the transport not only of merchandise arriving and departing with the European, foreign and country traders, but of that endless stream of articles for the food, use and manufactures of the teeming population, is but little known beyond the limits of Calcutta; and in justification of our proposal to provide a boat Dock, as accommodation to that increasing business, we will quote first from the *Calcutta Review*, June 1847.

“Nearly all the commerce between India and Europe has but two great emporia—Bombay and Calcutta—one for the western, and the other for the eastern side of India, which together receive the wealth of a continent, whose dimensions must be described by hundreds of thousands of square miles; whose geology presents every variety of feature, and which besides its peculiar and purely indigenous products, is capable of producing on hill, valley, or plain, . . . almost any thing which any other country produces; of edibles—tea, coffee, sugar, salt, rice, wheat, and other grains and seeds in uncounted variety—food for man and beast, which would make the poor at home envy even our horses; of raw materials for textile and other manufactures—silk, cotton, hemp, flax, jute . . . and hides; of dyes—indigo, shellac, lac dye, cochineal, &c.; oils in great variety; of gums, in great variety—copal, arabic, myrrh &c.; of drugs and medicines—besides opium and tobacco—a rich, but little known pharmacopoeia; woods; stones of great beauty, including marble, besides coal, iron and unexplored mineral treasures. India also has its manufactures; Decca its muslins; Murshedabad its silks; Patna its candles and cloths of all descriptions; Mirzapore its carpets, rugs, blankets; Benares its embroidered cloths, shoes; and a variety of other articles; Delhi and Kashmere its shawls and jewellery; Gazerat, in the Punjaub, its Damascene blades; and almost every district some branch of industry; the object of a commerce capable of vast increase if better means of transit were afforded.”

With respect to the traffic on the river from Calcutta upwards, we are able to extract some remarks bearing on the subject from

a pamphlet published by Mr. Albert Robinson, C.E., who, in 1843, carefully surveyed the Ganges from Allahabad downwards, and subsequently established steamers on that river. He says:

“Notwithstanding all the impediments which nature has placed in the way of the navigation of the Ganges, in the low water or dry season, it is still even then available for carrying on the traffic of the country to an extent that the resources of science and capital would find it no easy task to provide a substitute for.

“At the Jungeepore toll on the Bhagiratte, the only point, except Calcutta, where there is any return made; the number of these vessels which passed was, in the year 1844, 50,320 boats, the tonnage of which was upwards of three-quarters of a million.

“The articles enumerated consisted of grain, pulse, salt, sugar, indigo, cotton, saltpetre, oil seeds, mangoes, and vegetables, coal, lime, firewood, straw, &c.; in the above no account is taken of vessels with Government Stores, troops and ammunition, &c., nor of opium.

“The number of river craft arriving at Calcutta by the Soonderbund rivers upon which toll was collected, amounted, in 1844, to 125,000 boats, or an average of 340 boats per day, the total tonnage of which is about 1,250,000 tons. The traffic at these two points alone, added together (which it is fair to do), amount to upwards of 2,000,000 tons, or four times as much as the whole sea traffic in ships to and from Calcutta. No account was taken of boats under twenty-eight maunds.

“The returns from the Government Inland Steam Department in the same year, 1844, gave thirty-nine voyages, carrying 45,500 packages of goods, besides treasure and 2,500 passengers, and show a return of upwards of £ 56,000.

“From Mirzapore, a great mart of Ganges, it is reckoned that 18,000 tons of cotton, 2,000 tons of sugar, 1,000 tons of saltpetre, 1,500 tons of indigo, and 1,300 tons of shellac and lac dye, are annually sent down to Calcutta, whilst there is received at Mirzapore from Calcutta yearly, 8,000 tons of metal and hardware, 5,000 bales of twist, 3,000 packages of British silk and cotton goods, and 10,000 packages of other piece goods.”

It may be suggested that the greater part of these goods will be eventually carried by railway, and that the boat traffic will be

diminished in proportion; but in England we find, in many instances, that canals, placed in competition with railways, are carrying more goods than before the latter existed.

From: Andrew Henderson and Charles Creaves, *Floating Docks, Calcutta*, London, 1854.

## APPENDIX III

### ESTATES OF SOME OPULENT FAMILIES OF CALCUTTA

The inventories which follow are concerned mainly with real estates, shares, promissory notes, etc. Apart from these, every rich family in Calcutta was expected to possess gold, jewellery, shawls and other apparels, carriages, silver and brass utensils and a large amount of cash. These items are generally not mentioned in the inventories, though they may occur in some of them. It is conjectures about these possessions which led to varying and occasionally wild estimates of the wealth of the rich families.

The first inventory is very probably concerned with the properties left by Ratan Sarkar, one of the earliest interpreters of the English language in Calcutta according to tradition. It would be noticed that the term "Dobhasee" or interpreter occurs several times in the inventory. One street in Burrabazar bears the name "Ratan Sarkar Carden Street". A lane close to the area is known as "Rattoo Sircar's Lane".

Some of the inventories have been presented here in the form of abstracts. A part of the inventory of Ramdulal De's properties has been omitted here, having been listed in Chapter III of this book. The unit of land measurement in the inventories is the *bigha*, *catha* (spelt variously as *cotta*, etc.), and *chatak*. One *bigha* is roughly one-third of an acre, and is equivalent to 1600 square yards; one *catha* is 80 square yards and one *chatak* is 5 square yards. The spellings of the words in original documents have been retained here in most cases.

#### I

#### INVENTORY

Rattoo Sircar O.W. 773 (1764)

1. Brassware, Silverware, etc. . . . [blurred]
2. Sundry goods, Iron (43 Mds), Copper (25 Seers) . . . [blurred]  
[One *maund* is roughly equivalent to 37 kg. Forty *seers* make one *maund*.]
3. Ready money in different currencies. [Certain quantities of

gold, silver, gold thread etc. are mentioned but figures are not clear.]

4. Cloth: 51 pieces Santipore Noyansook, 65 pieces Hurripal Noyansook, 142 pieces Coosendiggah, 48 pieces white bordered handkerchiefs . . . [18 items can be read.]
5. 3 horses, 8 bullocks
6. 3 Budgerows [large boats], 1 dinghee [small boat]
7. 3 Palankeens [palanquins]
8. Houses and gardens. A garden named Shamum Bagan situated at Borobazar, a garden named Raush Bagan at Borobazar, a garden named Shobanoger Bagan at Sootanooty, the dwelling house situated at Borobazar, godly house adjoining to the dwelling house, cattle's stable adjoining to the dwelling house, servants' house adjoining to the dwelling house, a house known by Damodar Bysacks house situated at Borobazar, a house known by Damu Dobhasee's at Borobazar, [two other houses at Borobazar, names blurred], a house known by Pergun Dobhasee's, [another by] Kissno Gotack's at Borobazar, Bridjo Dobhasee's at Borobazar, warehouses situated at Sootanooty, lower room brick house now occupied by Mr. Dundes(?), several Boticks [shops] adjoining to the said house, an upper roomed house now occupied by Mr. Shell, another by Aoumy (?), another by Capt. Campbell, another by Capt. . . . [blurred], a lower roomed brick house occupied by . . . [blurred], another house occupied by Capt . . . [blurred], another house and a Botick (shop) situated at Borobazar, two boticks adjoining the house now occupied by another.
9. Debts due to the estate:  
 From Sundry persons amounting to  
 Current      Rs.    98,563 - 4 - 3  
 Bad Debts   Rs.    65,214 - 3 - 6  
  
 Current      Rs. 1,63,777 - 7 - 9
10. Sundry Deposits in the deceased[']s hands amounting to current Rupees five thousand two hundred thirty-five five annas and three pice.
11. Cash received from Mr. Thornhill for bond, from Rogo Metre  
 • [Raghu Mitra] from Coju Petruse, [European names]—Cash



received for Budgerow [boat] hire—Rs. 483 - 2 - 3

Sale of house and gardens—Rs. 71,138 - 3 - 6 •

12. Expenses:

Funeral charges—Rs. 8773 - 0 - 0

Repairing Budgerows—Rs. 894 - 3 - 9

Servants' wages—Rs. 19 - 7 - 9

House expenses—Rs. 2707 - 11 - 3

Godly service called Niyam Sabha—Rs. 651 - 15 - 9

Sreesary Bendaban [Sree Iswari Brindaban]—Rs. 368 - 14 - 0

Directed to be given to a slave named Shookah for his marriage—Rs. 135/-

Bendaban Sircar—Rs. 442 - 10 - 0

II

O.W. 1645 (1770)

Petition of Annuchurn Seat to Mayor's Court

Sheweth,

That it is about nine years since your pctitioners Grand-father/  
Ramkissen Seat/in his own right and in the right of his father/  
Jaddu Seat/had possessed of houses and gardens and estates  
situated in or near Calcutta.

The following situated in Great Bazar:

One brick upper room house and compound containing 1 biggah  
18 cottah ground in the present common dwelling house of all  
the heirs of the said Ramkissen Seat.

One small brick upper room house known by the name of  
Chora(?) Seat on three cottah ground.

One brick upper house and compound altogether 3 biggah and  
3 cottah ground.

One brick lower room house called Conjee Nundee's with com-  
pound containing 6 cottah ground.

One compound or garden [within] 4 brick walls containing  
14 cottah known by name of... [blurred] rented out in small  
tenements.

One lower room brick house known by being called Hurychurn  
Tagore's containing 13 cottah.

One garden containing 12 biggah called Bamun Gauchi.

One piece of ground known by being called Collychurn Mistry's  
containing 13 cottah rented in tenements. \*

Ground known by being called Ramkissen Poddar's containing 2 cottah.

Ground known by the name of Purru(?) Seat containing 3 cottah.

Ground known by being called... [blurred] containing... [blurred] biggah 11 cottah. On this ground Nerry Churn Seat built about 2 or 3 years since a large upper room house.

Ground [within] brick walls known by being called the stable containing 12 cottah and a half.

One shop or botick of brick now rented by Sugdeb Poddar's containing 9(?) cottah.

The following situated in Settanatty [Sutanuti]:

One large garden and brick lower room house containing 14(?) biggah and 10 cottah.

One piece of ground 5 cottah called Kisonb [Kesab] Noppit's [Napit, barber].

One garden(?) containing 20 biggah called Anundpor Boggin [bagan, garden].

The following situated in Chinsurah:

One upper room brick house and compound containing 15 cottah and a half.

The following situated in [on] the other side of the river opposite Calcutta:

One garden containing 10 biggah called Salky [Salkia] Baggan.

One garden opposite the old fort containing 16 biggah 15 cottah

Your petitioner further sheweth that when the aforesaid Ramkissen Seat died he left three sons/all since dead/who all jointly possessed and enjoyed the aforesaid houses and effects to their death...one of the said sons named... [blurred] Seat / was your petitioner's father and your petitioner is the only son and heir. That the other two sons of said Ramkissen Seat were the fathers of Govindchurn Seat and Nemechurn Seat now living the former of which hath also two younger brothers now living. This petitioner sheweth to the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Court that in right of his father... [blurred] Seat aforesaid your petitioner is entitled to one full third part of all the aforesaid houses and lands.

Your petitioner therefore most humbly prays that the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Court will please to order that the full one third part of the house be seized by peons from the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Court.

Besides the above mentioned houses and lands there is one piece of ground situated in Ultadingy containing 5 biggah and 8 cottah of what your petitioner is fully entitled to one third portion in right of his father aforesaid.

## III

## INVENTORY

Gokul Chandra Ghosal (died 1779)

O.W. 2791, Case filed 1797

Particulars of some estates or parcels of lands formerly the property of Cundrop Ghosaul deceased the father of the deceased Gocul Chunder Ghosaul, and which upon the decease of the said Cundrop Ghosaul descended to and became the joint property of Kissenchunder Ghosaul (now living) and the said deceased Gocul Chunder Ghosaul... (one half supposed to belong to Gocul & Kissenchunder each).

	B	C
Garden at Behala    Brohmottor [charity land]	25	17
"    "    "            "    "    "	14	11½
"    "    "            "    "    "	3	17¼
Garden at Alipore            "    "    "	—	—
"    "    Gurriah          "    "    "	45	7
At Cossipore, Soorah [charity land]		
Garden near Durmtollah in Calcutta ticka		
[rented out] land	4	5
One lower roomed home at Radabazar, Calcutta	2	1
One lower roomed home near Mr. Barwell's house		
8 cottah		
One piece of ground at [Sobha] Bazar 16 biggah		
One charity land at Arcooly		
Pieces of land at Kidderpore [etc.]		
Bazar erected on a piece of land at Kidderpore		
8 cottah		
Brohmottor land at Kidderpore 1 bigha		
Other charity land at Behala, Kidderpore		
One piece of land at Kidderpore on which the		
house lately occupied by the deceased is built		
23 b. 6 cottahs		

Rs. 50,000

Total Rs. 56,472

Particulars of some other estates, pieces or parcels of land bought or acquired by the said Gocul Chunder Ghosaul in his life time and which he died possessed of but in which the said Kissen-chunder Ghosaul likewise claims and is considered (as the elder brother of an undivided Hindoo family) to have a share or interest. . . .

Small pieces of land at Behala, Allipore, Kidderpore etc.

Brohmottor at Bansberiah, Balliagaut—5 cottahs—Rs. 12 - 8

Charity land at Mooragachia	273 b. 13 c.
	[figures for value not legible]

Brohmottor at Chitlah	130 b. 17 c. — Rs. 8,100
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One upper roomed house at Kidderpore	93 b. 4 c. — Rs. 40,000
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Two houses lately occupied by [Europeans]	— Rs. 24,000
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One piece of land at South Gurriah with brick built [house]	4 b. 19 c. — Rs. 119 - 8
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One piece of land at Howrah	7 b 8 c. — Rs. 250
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„ „ „ Kotering	3 b. — Rs. 45
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„ „ „ Hogli Koriah	16 b. — Rs. 6,400
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„ „ „ Belgachiah	53 b. — Rs. 266
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„ „ „ Baugbazar	4 b. 2 c. — Rs. 1,230
-----------------	-----------------------

Houses and lands at Calcutta :

One house and ground on the river side lately the property of Edward Ellington 15 c. — Rs. 25,000

One house and ground near Mr. Justice Hyde's in the occupation of Mr. William Pawson Esq. 12 c. — Rs. 30,000

One house and ground in the Rada Bazar in the occupation of Mr. McKagh(?) 18 c. — Rs. 10,000

One house and ground lately property of John Love 15 c. — Rs. 4,500

One house and ground of Messrs Tolfrey & Neylor 15 c. — Rs. 20,000

One piece of ground near Gocul Chunder Ghosaul's late dwelling house 14 c. — Rs. 9,400.

2 houses and ground Mr. Macy's late property 19 c. — Rs. 21,750

One house Mr. Lushington's property 1 b. 4 c. — Rs. 25,000

One house and ground late dwelling house of the deceased 14 c.  
— Rs. 2,800

One house and ground late Monick Gose's property 6 b. —  
Rs. 8,000

One house and ground Ramtoono Ray's at Jorasanko 2 b. 7½ c.  
— Rs. 14,000

One house and ground Nayan Tagoor's Cansary Tollah 1 b. 7½ c.  
— Rs. 4,000

One house and ground Ramtonoo Tagoor's(?) 1 b. 2 c. — Rs. 1,000  
2 pieces of ground on which two houses have been erected by  
Mr. . . . [blurred] 2 b. 2 c. — Rs. 4,200

1 piece of ground joint with Muckoor Poddar 2½ c. — Rs. 125

[Selective]

Pieces of ground at different places (Brohmottor)

Mujerhaut	4 b. 12 c. — Rs.	69
Soorsunah	3 b. 18 c. — Rs.	39
Duckheen Behala	3 b. 5 c. — Rs.	32 -
Ekbalpore	16 b. 17 c. — Rs.	168 -
Kidderpore	8 c. — Rs.	8
Rajah Aunand Loll's late property	7 b. — Rs.	1,000
Allipore	2 b. 8 c. — Rs.	36
One Brohmottor at Mulherhant	2 b. — Rs.	30
Mominpore	19 c. — Rs.	285
Ground Boytuckonnah	3 c. — Rs.	75
Ground Jorrah Baggun in the suburbs		
of Calcutta	1 b. 19 c. — Rs.	975
One piece of land at Banaras	5 b. — Rs.	500

List of other estates and lands called zamindari—joint properties of Gocul & Kissenchunder & Joynarain:

A share of 11 as 19 gunda 1 curry of pergunah called Sundeeep in the dist. of Dacca in the name of Bowanychurn Doss Rs. 37,662  
Pergunah Selimabad in the name of Bowanychurn Doss  
— Rs. 43,001

At Chittagong: of Joynagore in the name of Joynarain Ghosaul  
— Rs. 60,352

Under Calcutta Committee: of Sookchurr in the name of Joynarain of Bunderhollah in the name of Bowanychurn Doss  
— Rs. 5,426 - 14 - 11

[The value of following rural properties, possibly low-value, is not clearly stated.]

*Under Houghly*

Noyasorry in the name of Joynarain

*Under Murshidabad*

Gocul Gunge

*Under Rangpor District*

Koonay Mominpore

Fuzzlepore

Charagney Mehell

Total: Rs. 6,00,687 - 11 - 8

IV

INVENTORY

Sobharam Bysack (died 1780)

O.W. 2978

1. Aurungs [collection and bleaching centres of cloth] in different parts of Bengal such as Malda, Cossimbazar, Harial, Khirpai and Ghatal
2. List of [cotton] piece goods at the warehouse
3. Other articles of business :  
sandalwood (approx. 3 maunds), copper (31 seers), lead (203 maunds approx.), pepper (19 seers approx.), cotton (1400 bales, about 630 maunds), 364 bags of cotton (345 maunds), silk of Keerpoy and Cossimbazar (about 4½ maunds), cloves, alum, brimstone, etc., opium (9 chests, 18 maunds), soap, white lead, 891 pearls of various sizes (61 large sized), 413 diamonds, 35 rubies, gold mohor, gold thread, roll, etc.
4. Bonds from Europeans and Armenians such as Samuel Middleton, Koja Woanis, Captain Scott, Lynch, Gibbert, Messrs Crofts and Johnson and others—total bond value—Rs. (Arcot) 5,27,112.
5. Debts to the estate from Indian merchants such as Modan Mohan Dutta — Rs. 53,083
6. Balances outstanding at different aurungs — Rs. 2,07,761
7. Ventures to Suez, Bombay, Bussorah etc. — Rs. 45,751
8. Total amount due from bonds, debts to the estates etc. — Rs. 9,39,500
9. Debts from Sobharam, [some European names], Madan

Mohan Dutt, Madan Mohan Tagore, Darpa Narain Tagore,  
Govind Chand Bysack and others — Rs. 4,89,893 •

10. Inventory of the houses and land owned by Sobharam  
Bysack:

The former dwelling house of Sobharam Bysack situated in  
Burra [Bazar] from the South to the North end

The house situated in Burra Bazar distinguished by the name  
[blurred]

The house formerly belonging to Bulram Paramanick in the Burra  
Bazar

The house formerly belonging to Suntose in the Burra Bazar

The house formerly belonging to Kinoo Washerman situated in  
Burra Bazar

The house formerly belonging to Gourang Weaver situated at  
Sootanooty

A garden situated in Arcooly

The new house formerly belonging to [blurred] in Sootanooty

The house formerly belonging to Bindabund Bysack situated in  
Sootanooty

A house at Chinsurah

A house at Fringeetoolah [European town in Calcutta]

The garden formerly belonging to Rajahram Mondol situated in  
Dhee [Dihi] Calcutta

The eastward part of the late dwelling of Sobharam Bysack

The house formerly belonging to Nundoram Coybatta [Kaibarta]

The house formerly belonging to [blurred]

The house formerly belonging to Burram (?) Chowbdar situated  
in the Burra Bazar

The houses formerly belonging to (1) Gopey Pundit, (2) Mohun-  
lall, (3) Huzzoory Mull, (4) Pettumbir Bysack, (5) Collychurn  
Mistry, (6) Juggernaut Bysack, (7) Santosh Bysack (8) Rajram  
Painter [all in Burra Bazar]

The house formerly belonging to (1) Panchoo Doss and (2) Hottee  
situated in Sootanooty

A small garden in [blurred]

A garden situated in Saumbazar

The house formerly belonging to (1) Jugull Sircar, (2) Bulram  
Mukherjee situated in Sootanooty

A garden situated at Chitpoor

The ground received in exchange of that at Goobindpore being

one bigha which is included in the garden of Gopall Seat at Jorrahbangun [Jorabagan]

The house formerly belonging to Sri Bullub Bysack at Sootanooty

The cow stall formerly belonging to Occoor Dutt situated in Sootanooty

The ground formerly belonging to Kincor Sircar situated at Sootanooty

The house formerly belonging to Neetoo Bysack

The house formerly belonging to (1) Gopee Seat, (2) Anondyram Mistry, (3) Brindabone Mistry situated in Burra Bazar

The house formerly belonging to Poroshram Bysack situated in Sootanooty

## V

### WILL AND INVENTORY

Joykissen Singh (died 1820)

O. W. 2978

“Our late father Santiram Singh was in service for a long time and in different parts of the country.” The property was held joint till the time of the preparation of the will by Joykissen and “increased four times by means of service and trade” since the death of Santiram Singh.

Particulars of gifts amount to Rs. 1,05,000. Expenses of Sradh Rs. 10,000. Gift to “my first wife Raomayee Dassy Rs. 10,000 my second wife Shibsoonday Dussy Rs. 10,000”.

“In the will I have made my own share a seven anna portion of the whole property consisting of cash, Company’s paper and gold and silver plates and ornaments and jewels, wearing apparels, shawls, houses in the English part of the town and houses in the Bengally part of the town and godowns in the English part of the town and godowns in the Bengally part of the town, premises let out to tenants in the Bengally part of the town and rent from villages and talooks and my Bhadrashan [family seat] etc. and gardens.”

Seven anna share of the property was to be given to his son if born. Will signed on 12 November 1819. Petition for probate describes Joykissen Singh as Banian. Joykissen’s nephew, one of the executors of the will, also describes himself as Banian.



Abstract statement of annual accounts (from October 1820 to April 1821) of monies and securities for money belonging to the joint estate and also monies due from several persons as per account.

Total including Company's paper, shares, bonds and cash	Rs. 18,81,511
Immovable estates in Calcutta	Rs. 7,40,430
Immovable estates out of Calcutta	Rs. 2,41,384
Rent free property in and out of Calcutta	Rs. 89,950
Sundry goods	Rs. 55,100
Outstanding debts	Rs. 3,18,382
In the office box of Modden Mohan Bose	Rs. 1,558
In the box of Joykissen Singh (bonds and notes)	Rs. 4,845
Total value of the joint estate	Rs. 33,33,160
Sundry goods (selected items) in the joint estate:	
Woollen clothes and shawls	Rs. 5,000
Carriages	Rs. 3,000
Gold and silver plates	Rs. 14,000
English, Bengali and Persian books	Rs. 3,000
Laced beds and cloth	Rs. 5,000
Lanterns, wall shades and Bellowry jawrs or lustres, etc.	Rs. 7,000
Pictures, looking glasses, etc.	Rs. 2,000
Curtains, tents, summeanas [canopies]	Rs. 1,500
Statement of immovable joint estate in Calcutta after the death of Joykissen Singh:	
One lower roomed house called Takoor Bautty situated in Baranussy Ghose's St., 3 cottas	Rs. 3,600
One dwelling house at Baranussy Ghose's St., 6 b.	Rs. 1,25,000
One vacant ground at ditto, 3 cottas	Rs. 1,200
One upper roomed house and garden named Barrodowarry at ditto	Rs. 1,00,000
One lower roomed stable, etc. at Chassadobhapparrah St., 8 cottas	Rs. 4,000
One lower roomed house situated at ditto, 4 cottas	Rs. 2,000
One garden situated in Baranussy Ghose's Street, 5 bighas 14 cottas	Rs. 30,000
One upper roomed house and garden situated in Sukeas St. 30 bighas	* Rs. 1,25,000

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Two pieces of ground situated in Hogolcoorea, 2 b.	Rs.	8,000
Godown at Nimtollah, 1 bigha 3 cottas	Rs.	25,000
One upper roomed house at Chitpore Road on Machooa Bazar, 3 bighas 8 cottas	Rs.	7,000
One upper roomed house in Rajah Nubkissen St., 7 cottas 14 chataks	Rs.	3,500
One piece of ground at Baneatollah St., 7 c.	Rs.	7,750
One upper roomed house at Clive St., 2 b. 2 c. 5 ch.	Rs.	1,00,000
One upper roomed house and garden at New China Bazar St. called [blurred], 1 b. 14 c.	Rs.	50,000
One upper roomed house at Chowringhec Road, 6 b. 10 c.	Rs.	1,00,000
One upper roomed house at Harington St., 6 b. 5 c. 12 ch.	Rs.	1,00,000
Two upper roomed houses at China Bazar Gully 1 b.	Rs.	20,000
Total value of landed property in Calcutta	Rs.	8,25,550
Value after deductions (as mentioned in the accounts)	Rs.	7,40,430

### Immovable estate outside Calcutta :

Select list of immovable property—In Hooghly One talook

One talook at Cotrung and Boyrah	Rs.	15,000
One garden at Furrasdanga 3 b.	Rs.	1,500

In Zilla Havely (suburbs of Calcutta).

One piece of ground at Jeerat named Wilkinsgunge 122 b.	Rs.	1,22,000
One garden with tank, trees, etc., at Manicktolla, Wooltadanga 35 b.	Rs.	52,500
Two gardens with tanks, trees, etc. at Caukurgachi 22 b. 13 c.	Rs.	30,000
One garden with tanks, trees, etc. at Baugmary 16 b.	Rs.	16,000
One garden with tanks, trees, etc. at Chitpore 5 b.	Rs.	5,000

In Zilla Burdwan :

Bhabanipur and Bosuntpore, 2 villages	Rs.	14,000
Two other villages	Rs.	4,000

In Zilla Havely (suburbs of Calcutta):

• One piece of ground at Salkia 35 b.	Rs.	35,000
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One garden with tanks and trees  
at Chitpore 29 b. 5 c. Rs. • 30,000  
Gardens, tanks etc. at other places in the suburbs

## VI

Maharaja Rajkissen (died 1823)  
O.W. 9841

I. *Account Current from September 1823 to September 1824*

Receipts from Perguna Gungamundl: Rs. 61,209  
Perguna Muragacha: Rs. 41,101 - 11 - 3  
Kismet Panyhattee, Agarparah and  
Bhobanypore: Rs. 1,219 - 10  
Receipts from property in the town of  
Calcutta: Rs. 26,820 - 14 - 15  
From Talook Sootalooty [Sutanuti]: Rs. 2,585  
Baroodkhana and Baughbazar, etc.: Rs. 5,068 - 10 - 0  
Bytukkhana (bazar): Rs. 6,237 - 9 - 0  
Radhabazar: Rs. 5,887  
Total Receipts: Rs. 1,63,714 - 14 - 13

*Expenditure:*

Mulgoozari [land revenue, taxes, etc.]: Rs. 48,000  
Cost of Zilla Adalat [district court]: Rs. 958  
Obtaining probate: Rs. 2,500  
Legacy by will of Maharaja: Rs. 2,923  
For six Ranees diet and cloth: Rs. 3,207  
Amount due to the executors: Rs. 4,000  
For purchase of cloth for all the sons of the late  
Maharaja Bahadoor: Rs. 1,972  
Purchase of gold and silver for the family: Rs. 1,934  
Home expenses: Rs. 5,020  
Straw and oil cake for the cows: Rs. 700  
Paid for carriage, harness etc.: Rs. 816  
Repairs on dwellings and tenanted houses: Rs. 1,723  
Wages of servants, amlas, peons, maid servants: Rs. 7,369  
Total wages: Rs. 8,470

*Pooja expenses:*

Sarodiya [Durga Pooja]: Rs. 1,478  
Kali Thakoorany of Kalighat: Rs. 34

For Deepanilah Lakshmi: Rs. 34  
Lakshmipooja in three different months: Rs. 13  
Sree Punchamy [Saraswati Pooja]: Rs. 15  
Sibaratri: Rs. 4  
Gangapooja [worship of the Ganges]: Rs. 16  
Gajunpooja: Rs. 178  
Kulsi Ootsurga [offering of water buckets before the advent of summer]: Rs. 5  
Water dispensing charge: Rs. 28  
Complimentary presents in different places: Rs. 108  
Brahmins for four Poornimas [full-moon nights]: Rs. 50  
Poojas on birthdays: Rs. 43  
Vojee Ootsurga: Rs. 16  
Sastayan [divine intercession]: Rs. 44  
Baranagore's daily Sibpooja: Rs. 12  
Itu [pooja]: Rs. 5  
Barsick [annual offering] to Issore Thakur Mahasay before annual holiday: Rs. 25  
Subhapunya charge [auspicious day]: Rs. 10  
Barsick [annual payment]: Rs. 42  
Barsick to relatives at the time of Issore Pooja: Rs. 200  
Pooran reading: Rs. 136  
Pattasurry Pooja in winter: Rs. 4  
Arandhan [non-cooking day] expenses: Rs. 4  
Bhratriditiya [Brother's Day]: Rs. 65  
Dewali light [illumination]: Rs. 6  
Sastibrata [worship of Sasti, Goddess of children]: Rs. 113  
Pooja Total: Rs. 2724  
Doctor's wages and medicine: Rs. 973  
Tobacco: Rs. 67  
To the Ranees' interest on deposits: Rs. 954  
Visiting places and attending invitations: Rs. 1,011  
Sradh charges: Rs. 24,014  
For the ten months masik [monthly] *Sradh*: Rs. 127  
Wax and honey: Rs. 391  
Debts paid including Rs. 4453 paid to the Johuree [jeweller] for purchase of precious stones—total: Rs. 10,883  
Paid in payment of [debts of] late Mathurmohon Sen and Raj Kissen Sen (Bankers): 23,760  
Paid for fine rice, sugar, ghee, milk, flour, butter, spices and

earth[en] pot for Jhulan Jatra (Janmastami or Krishna's birthday), Doljatra, Poonmasy, Akhaytritiya, Janmatithi, Neomseva [daily care of the deity] and daily pooja of Sri Sri Gopinathjee [the family idol]: Rs. 2498

Wages: Rs. 663

Balance remaining: Rs. 2514

Total disbursement: Rs. 1,61,200 .

II. *Receipts from September 1825 to September 1826:*

Rs. 2,13,932

Expenditure apart from loans advanced: Rs. 96,180

III. *Account Current from September 1829 to September 1830*

Receipts: Rs. 3,91,858

Items of expenditure include:

Schoolcharges for Bahadurs [Raja's sons] and stationery:  
Rs. 130

Grain for horses and wages of coachmen and syces .  
Rs. 1,204

Cash paid for purchasing tea: Rs. 151

Expenses for Durga Pooja: Rs. 4091

Wages for amlas, peons and maid servants: Rs. 8,630

Total expenses including allowances to Maharaja Bahadurs [adult sons of Maharaja Rajkissen] and Bahadurs [minor sons]: Rs. 1,09,055

## VII

### WILL AND INVENTORY

Ramdulal De (died 1825)

O.W. 10402

In his will the testator refers to his "elder wife" and "younger wife". He mentions his two sons, and David Clarke, John Smith, William Fairlie Clarke, merchants of the Fairlie, Ferguson & Co. as executors.

(Break-up figures of his other estates are to be found in Chapter III of this book.)

Houses and ground belonging to Ramdulloll Dey:

1. Dwelling House situated at Shootanooty with  
two bighas and nine cottahs of ground Rs. 45,000

2. Dwelling House at do with 5 b. and 8 c. of ground	Rs. 35,000
3. Dwelling House at do with [blurred] of ground	Rs. 1,000
4. Dwelling House with 1 b. and 9 c. of ground	Rs. 7,250
5. Dwelling House at do with 1 b. 16 c. 11½ ch. of ground	Rs. 9,900
6. Dwelling House at do with 1 b. of ground	Rs. 4,500
7. Dwelling House at do with 4 c. and 6½ ch. of ground	Rs. 3,500
8. Dwelling House at Sobha Bazar with 1 b. and 17 c. of ground	Rs. 18,500
9. A piece of ground at Bahar Simlah 20 b.	Rs. 40,000
10. A piece of ground at do 20 b.	Rs. 3,100
11. Dwelling House at Saum Bazar 4 b. and 14 c.	Rs. 16,000
12. Dwelling House called Lochan Currwalla Bauty [place not mentioned] with 1 b. 15½ c. of ground	Rs. 40,000
13. Dwelling House called Ramjoy Currwallah Bauty with 11 c. of ground	Rs. 7,000
14. Dwelling House at New China Bazar with 14 c. of ground	Rs. 39,000
15. Dwelling House at New China Bazar with with 1 b. 2 ch. of ground	Rs. 50,000
16. Five other dwelling houses [places not specified]	Rs. 35 000
	Rs. 40,000
	Rs. 7,000
	Rs. 36,000
	Rs. 35,000
17. Godown [place not specified]	Rs. 5,000
18. Dwelling House at Church Lane with 1 b. 3¼ c. of ground	Rs. 54,000
19. Piece of ground at Maumorry [Memary] in the district of Burdwan consisting of 1088 b. and 15 c.	Rs. 40,000
20. Talook at Mouza Durgapur in the district of Midnapur	Rs. 17,000
21. Ground at Salkiya 3 b.	Rs. 1,500
22. Piece of ground at Benares of 500 yards (?)	Rs. 1,500
[Other figures in the inventory not so clear]	
Total value of houses and land [mentioned in the inventory]	Rs. 6,78,750

Total amount of rent [both outstanding and up to date payment] from May 1825 to April 1826      Rs. . 25,314

VIII  
INVENTORY OF LANDED PROPERTIES

Asutosh De  
Probate 1858, O.W. 18293

	[Rs.]
1. Gillet Wallah house No. 4 in Church Lane	34,000
2. Berrick Battee [Barracks] and tenanted land at Sobhabazar	10,500
3. Chand Beebee Wallah tenanted land at Harrisson (?)	4,700
4. A piece of land which once appertained to Mr. Hawey at Royd Street in Collingah	3,000
5. Land at Bowbazar which once appertained to Surrosutty Beebee	3,200
6. House at Jorabagan called Parreijatwallah Battee	2,925
7. Garden for the accommodation of Strangers at Belgatchia	17,000
8. Juggernaut Bose Wallah garden ground at Entally	6,300
9. A piece of garden in Tollah	2,100
10. Garden ground in Entally which once appertained to Beebee De Costa	1,325
11. Land at Baliaghatta which once appertained to Doorgaram Ghose and Gurriboolah Immamdar	800
12. Tenanted land at Tollah	1,500
13. House at New China Bazar called Kulghurwallah godown	3,000
14. Garden at Tollah which once appertained to Gourmohun Gossamy	3,300
15. Cootee Battee or office house at Monirampur	18,000
16. A garden at Belghuria which once appertained to Collachand Bose	7,000
17. Godown No. 5 in Church Lane which once appertained to Duckhina Ranjan Mookerjee	18,500
18. [Piece of land] at Durmahattah once appertained to Maheschunder Bose and Punchanan Bose	9,750
19. A piece of land at Durmahatta	[no price mentioned]
20. House and land at Baneatollah in Calcutta formerly belonging to Ramtonoo Bose	2,500

21. Kuddumtollah Bazar and tenanted ground which once appertained to late Luckhsyarain Dutta at Churruckdangah	5,500
22. House and land at Simlah which once appertained to the late Ramsoondur Biswas	5,500
23. A piece of land at Sobhabazar	5,500
24. Share of land in Coloobagaun in Simlah	3,300
25. Piece of garden at Sittee	4,000
26. Late Ramdeb Paul Wallah house at Simlah	2,600
27. Piece of land at Simlah	1,600
28. Piece of land at Terettee Bazar which once belonged to Collachand Bose	1,500
29. A piece of garden at Belgachia which once appertained to Gungapersaud Ghose	2,000
30. A piece of land at Simlah which once appertained to Mr. Shaw	4,750
31. A piece of land at Pykeparah which once appertained to Ramdhone Poitully	600
32. Doyaram Chatterjee Ooallah land at Shambazar which once appertained to Collachand Bose	1,120
33. Piece of land at Tangrah which once appertained to the late Ramnarain Ghose	[blurred]
*34. Godown at Armanitollah—to Brindabun Mitter	4,500
35. [blurred] land at Mirzapur—to late Ramnarain Ghose	3,800
36. Land at Duckhindaree—to Mudden Mohan Mittre	9,500
37. Land at Sonagatchee—to Jogesh Chunder Ghose	225
38. Bacharam Doss Ooallah land at Simlah—to Annadapersaid Deb Baboo	200
39. Land at Baugbazar—to Modoosoodun Roy	3,900
40. Land at Matchooabazar—to Jogeshchunder Ghose	1,050
41. A piece of garden at Belgatchia—to Rammohun Chatterjee	800
42. Share of land at Baugbazar—to Ramcanto Ghose	717 - 8
43. Share of garden at Ballygunge—to Mr. Cockburn	1,000
44. Share of garden in Turrah Parrah—to Junmajay Mitter	500
45. Garden in Soorah—Junmajay Mitter	300

\* From item 34 onwards, the dashes stand for the words "which once appertained".



46. Land at Chuckurbare—to Mahomed Azee (not yet in possession, law suit continues)	no price
47. Properties dedicated for the worship of deities :	
(a) 8 as share of three-storied house No. 2 at New China Bazar	12,500
(b) 8 as share of Parooallah House No. 3 at New China Bazar	20,000
(c) 8 as share in Ramsunker Bysack Ooallah garden in Belgatchia	1,500
(d) Share in garden and land [blurred]	200
(e) House No. 1 in Lyon's Range in New China Bazar commonly called Hamilton Wallah Battee	28,500
(f) House No. 3 in New China Bazar commonly called Kamanpottah Battee	25,200
(g) Tenanted land No. 18 in Burra Bazar which once appertained to Kallykamungul Takoor	13,400
(h) A moiety of joint family dwelling house at Simlah together with land [not mentioned whether set apart for religious purposes]	30,000
(i) A moiety of a house—to Lolljee Mossulfa—situate at [blurred]	2,500
(j) A moiety of land and house situate at Cossinauth Mitter's Ghat in Calcutta	600
(k) A moiety of land and the Gola Ghur situate at Mollajhar	700

## List of the Zamindari Properties

	Present value (more or less)
A moiety of Pergunna Shaulumpore	95,000
„ „ Pergunna Tumlook	5,529 - 4 - 0
„ „ Pergunna Raugdyw (?)	25,000
„ „ Talook Durgapore	4,000
„ „ Chuttrah Dibgunge	2,000
„ „ lot Sitahattee, together with the indigo factory	9,000
Mockam Bansbariah	2,800
Mouza Mohubutpore	10,000
	(for religious purpose)
Cottee in Sitahattee	4,000

Pergunna Huldoho	62,700
And Dehee Chundy	800

IX  
INVENTORY

Raja Radhakanta Deb (died 1867)  
O.W. 22519

Receipts from 17th April, 1867 to 4th April, 1868  
[Important items]

Pergunah Muragacha	Rs 38,690 - 3 - 13
Pergunah Havely Sahur Kismet	
Echapore and Nababgunge	Rs. 3,140 - 15 - 5
Pergunah Calcutta, mouzah Sukechur and Lakheraj mahals at Sodepore	Rs. 3,783 - x - x*
Pergunah Boro Pykan, Kismet Howrah and Chur Howrah	Rs. 969 - 4 - 6
Dehee Punchannagram of Nayabad Ghaut and Tangra Ghaut	Rs. 1,052 - 2 - 5
Received from Izaradars [lessees] for different mehals—Mehal Machooabazar, Kistobagan, Sobhabazar [all tenanted land]	Rs. 30,236 - 7 - 10
Additional dues from mehal Sobhabazar, Machooabazar, Kistobagan Bazar, tolls from Coomortooly Ghat	Rs. 14,565 - 10 - 0
Total receipts including other items	Rs. 2,96,929 - 4 - 6

Disbursements [important items]

a/c of expenses of daily worship and periodical religious ceremonies of the idols and Durga Pujah	Rs. 7,659 - 15 - 15
Expenditure on Radhakanta's Sradh directed by his will	Rs. 12,000 - 0 - 0
Total disbursements including debts paid	Rs. 2,86,925 - 13 - 16

\* Crosses indicate that figures were not legible.

## APPENDIX IV

### STRUCTURAL PATTERN OF BUILDINGS IN OLD CALCUTTA

The houses of the wealthier classes are brick-built, from two to three stories high, closely constructed and divided only by dirty, narrow and unpaved streets; the roofs are flat and terraced. This is the general character of that portion of the black town called Burra Bazar, in which are to be found, however, some residences which, on account of their peculiar arrangement, require a separate mention; I mean the houses of the Baboos. These are uniformly built in the form of a hollow square, with an area of from 50 to 100 feet each way, which, on the occasion of Hindoo festivals, is covered over, and when well lighted up, looks very handsome. The house itself is seldom of more than two stories, the lower portion, on three sides of it, being used only for store-rooms, or for domestics; on the remaining side, and that always the northern one, is to be found the Thakoor Ghur, or abode of the Hindoo Gods. This is always furnished with care, and when the owner is wealthy, the lustres contained in this sacred apartment are of considerable value. Above the stairs are the public apartments, with verandahs, always [opening] inwards: these are generally long narrow slips, containing a profusion of lustres and wall lights. . . . jutting out from this main building are situated the accommodations allotted to the females, and family; they consist of smaller hollow squares, with petty verandahs opening inwards, and some houses have two or three sets of these zunnanahs, with one or more tanks attached, but which are generally kept in a very neglected state. Altogether, this form of building, if placed on open ground and made more roomy, would not appear ill-calculated for the climate.

From: Sir J. R. Martin, *Notes on the Medical Topography of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1837, pp. 19 - 20.



In a judicial document of 1867 one of the oldest houses belonging to a rich Calcutta family is described in some detail. The

house was originally built by Raja Nabakrishna of Sobhabazar in the second half of the 18th century. During more than one hundred years of its existence the house (or more accurately a complex of houses) must have undergone some changes but was likely to have retained its original structural character.

Radhakanta Deb, grandson of Raja Nabakrishna, thus writes in his will:

"I have something to say regarding the mode in which my several dwelling houses shall be used by the family—namely the family Rajbaree [literally, house of a Raja] and the garden house at Sookcher. It is my wish and direction to the executors and trustees that the Thakurdalans [rooms and covered space for family deities] with the compound and the side rooms and confection rooms, store-houses and godowns, the Navaratna [temple] and Natmandir [covered space for devotional singing, recitation, etc.] and the new chak [square] surrounded by buildings to the north thereof and also the new cow house to the east of it belonging to and situated in the said family dwelling house number 34 Raja Nabkrissen Street in Calcutta shall and will be set apart appropriated and dedicated to the use and worship of the family idol and for the performance of other religious rites and festivals—that the old and new Dewan Khanas [reception rooms or hall] also a part of the said family dwelling house shall be and as hereafter used by my sons and their heirs and representatives jointly for the purposes of dancing, music and other amusements, for reception of respectable persons and for public meetings and other purposes—that the Duftar Khana or office rooms and the family cook rooms of the said family dwelling house shall be used as heretofore—that the garden called Gobindabagan and the tank therein part of and lying within the said family dwelling house shall remain as they now are for the common use of my sons, their heirs and representatives, that the Baitakkhana [parlour] in the said Gobindabagan together with all out-houses and appurtenances shall be used and occupied by each of my sons and their respective heirs [and] representatives for one year alternately according to their respective seniority in age or priority of birth . . . that the rooms called Khabarghar [dining room] the small room to the south of it and the hall called Dhalaghar, the room to the south thereof called Nabarghar [bathroom] and the two halls of the Rangmahal [inner rooms used by women for

relaxation] on the third floor shall remain common to the use of female members of the family on occasions for which they are used. . . .”

*Radhakanta Deb, Will and Inventory, dated 1867*

## APPENDIX V

### SOME REPRESENTATIVE BENGALI NEIGHBOURHOODS

The following lists contain the names and occupations of "important" people of Calcutta in 1856, besides some other items like huts, temples, tombs, etc. They are selected from *The New Calcutta Directory* of 1856, except for the last one (Bhowanipur) which is taken from the *Directory* of 1863. Of the last two lists, Durmahatta reflects the nature of a major riverine mart in the so-called Bengali town, referred to at the end of Chapters I-III. The last list, Bhowanipur, refers to a southern suburb of Calcutta with a noticeable middle class element.

#### BALAKHANA STREET

1. Goury Shunkur Bhattacharjee, proprietor and editor of the Bhaskur newspaper & the press.
2. Lallbaharry Chatterjee, banker.
3. Muctaram Bhattacharjee, pundit at the Madrissa College.
4. Bijoy Kristo Ghose, head writer at Kattlewell, Drabble and Co.
5. Issurchunder Dutt, saltpatre merchant.

#### BOSEPARAH LANE

1. Boloychand Gossaye, spiritual guide.
2. Rabatee Mohun Gossaye, spiritual guide.
3. Looknath Bose, Sudderallah [a middle-grade executive or judicial officer].
4. Nundoo Coomar Dutt, broker.
5. Ramchunder Bose, coach-builder.
6. Punchanun Bose, head clerk at O. Beeby's, Attorney.
7. Doorgachurn Dey, surveyor, E. I. Railway.
8. Canaram Chatterjee, employed at College of Fort William.

#### BULLARAM DEY'S STREET

1. Obhoy Churn Mullick, up-country trader.
2. Brojendranarain Roy, native doctor.
3. Nobin Kisto Mitter, book-keeper at John Herriot and Co's., merchant.

4. Botokisto Pal, twist merchant.
5. Rajkisto Dhur, lithographer.
6. Gopaul Lall Roy, die engraver at the Mint.
7. Sibchunder Bysack, sub-assistant surgeon.
8. Kosseynauth Mundul, grain merchant.
9. Putet Pabun Sen, bill-broker.

#### BULLARAM MOOZOOMDAR'S STREET

1. Kassee Chuckerbuttee, native merchant.
2. Dwarkanath Mitter, landlord.
3. Sreethur Mundul, zemindar.
4. Nemychurn Doss, attorney's banian.
5. Modhoosoodun Doss, attorney's banian.

#### BUNMALEE SIRKAR'S STREET

1. Bhobaney Churn Mitter, assistant interpreter, Supreme Court.
2. Saradapersad Dutt, pleader, Court of Small Causes.
3. Taraney Churn Ghose, sircar.
4. Modosooden Nundy, grain merchant.
5. Radhanath Sen, native doctor.
6. Jonadun Neugee, landholder.

#### DURPUNARAIN THAKOOR'S LANE

1. Rakhulchunder Mitter, gunny bag merchant.
2. Jodoonath Chatterjee, zemindar.
3. Bhoykuntanath Roy, vakeel of Sudder Dewanny Adawlat.
4. Hurrymohun Sircar, linseed merchant.
5. Denobundoo Mullick, landlord.
6. Toolseedas Mullick, landlord.
7. Gobindo Chunder Auddy, landlord.
8. Lall Mohun Roy, landlord.
9. Kristomohun Bysack, landlord.
10. Rughoonath sen, merchant & broker.
11. Garden house of Deenobundoo Mullick.
12. Modhoosoodun Roy, proprietor of the *Hindoo Patriot* press.
13. Lukeenarain Roy, merchant.
14. Thakoor Doss Gossey, zemindar.
15. Gopal Hurry Mullick, gunny bag merchant. ✧

DURZEE PARA STREET

1. Rajchunder Dutt, moonshee of Fort William College.
2. Hurrymohun Dutt, moonshee of Fort William College.
3. Coylas Chunder Mookerjee, asst. in Bengal Secretariat.
4. Maudhubchunder Curmocar, goldsmith.
5. Sissoochunder Mitter, landlord.

JELIA TOLLAH STREET

1. Muddosooden Mullick, lithographic printer and engraver.
2. Ramnarain Sreemonce, cotton merchant.
3. Kallykristo Biswas, banian to Jews and Madras merchants.
4. Bancemadhub Ghose, 2nd asst. at Civil Auditor's Office.
5. Anundochunder Bose, asst. dewan at Military Pay Office.
6. Bhubon Dhur, banker of Burra Bazar.
7. Ramsagur Mundul, grain merchant.

JELIA PARAH LANE

1. Muddosoodun Mullick, govt. pensioner.
2. Beerchand Dey, bill-broker.
3. Muddosoodun Budden, money-lender.

JORABAGAN STREET

1. Sibnarain Ghose, zemindar.
2. Hollodhur Doss, metal merchant.
3. Rajkisto Kanný Sha, merchant.
4. Sreeramchunder Coondoo and Co., merchants.
5. Radhamohun Sha, rice godowns.
6. Madhubchunder Poramanick, landholder.
7. Chooneelall Doss, landholder.
8. Nobin Juggonath, safflower merchant.
9. *Nittodherma-nourjeeka*, a Bengalee journal.
10. Nundoocomar Cobeerutna, editor of *Nittodherma-nourjeeka*.

NUNDO RAM SEN'S STREET

1. Russicklal Gossamy, spiritual guide.
2. Gopeenauth Mookerjee, banian of W. Moran & Co.'s indigo mart.
3. Rajnarain Mitter, asst., Salt Board.
4. Judoonauth Mullick, pleader in the Sudder Dewanny Adawlat.



5. Ramlochan Pal, grain merchant.
6. Ramchunder Pal, grain merchant.
7. Hurrishunder Pal, grain merchant.
8. Mallee Persand Mookerjee, straw merchant.
9. Gungaram Shaw, rice merchant.
10. Rajnarain Dhole, chemist and druggist.
11. Gobinchunder Gossamy, spiritual guide.
12. Gouree Persand Moitre, banian at Braddon & Co.
13. Ramkisto Das, head clerk at Ochme & Barrow's.

#### NYANCHAND DUTT'S STREET

1. Kistochunder Halder, cloth merchant.
2. Taruckchunder Ghose, teacher at the Hindoo Metropolitan Branch School.
3. Sreenath Bose, zemindar.
4. Lall Chand Mitter, store-keeper, Fort William, 2nd Gate.
5. Mudubchunder Coberaj, native doctor.
6. Madhubchunder Mitter, banian.
7. Hullodhur Bose, merchant.
8. Ramchand Sircar, produce broker.
9. Aushotos Dey, banian & merchant.
10. Madubchunder Bose, book-keeper at the naval store-keeper's office.

#### KALEEPERSAD DUTT'S STREET

1. Surroopchunder Dutt, tradesman.
2. Joynarain Mitter, zemindar.
3. Gopalchunder Newgee, security man.
4. Calleykristo Dha, merchant.
5. Preonath Gossamee, spiritual guide.
6. Maharaja Kalee Krishna Bahadoor.
7. Prosonnonarain Roy's garden.
8. Ramnarain Dass, sub-assistant surgeon.
9. Coondoochunder Chatterjee, pundit.
10. Monohur Mookerjee, sub-assistant surgeon.
11. Radhanath Laha, castor-oil manufactory.

#### KASEE MITTER'S GHAUT STREET

1. Nobin Mooreepoora, charm utterer at funeral ceremonies.
2. Nobinchunder Bhattacharjee, reporter on dead bodies.

3. Kasee Mitter's Ghaut, for burning the dead bodies of Hindoos.
4. Sreekisto Ghose, banian of Purrier and Co.

RAM KANTH BOSE'S STREET

1. Tarrapersad Gopto, native physician.
2. Mustard Oil manufactory.
3. Boycuntnath Bose, sub-assistant overseer, Dept. of Public Works.
4. Huts.
5. Garden House of Dinnoonath Mitter, horse dealer.
6. Kadarnath Bose, head writer at the Master's Office, Supreme Court.
7. Lucknarain Bose, zemindar.
8. Gobinchunder Bose, coach-builder.
9. Joguth Chunder Banerjee, teacher at the General Assembly's Institution.
10. Shamachurn Banerjee, banian.
11. Mohunchand Bose, singer.
12. Beepen Beharee Shome, teacher at the Free Church Institution.
13. Huts.
14. Ramchunder Ghose, castor oil manufactory.

RAMTONOO BOSE'S LANE

1. Hurrischunder Dey, cloth merchant.
2. Coilaschunder Bose, indexer in the Bengal Secretariat Office.
3. Doorgachurn Mullick, pundit.
4. Cossinath Mundel, grain merchant.
5. Kristopersand Chatterjee, commission agent.
6. Sumbhoochunder Bose, landholder.
7. Punchanun Mitter, book-keeper at Schoene, Kilburn and Co.'s.

RAJAH RAJBULLUB'S STREET

1. Jodoonauth Mitter, zemindar.
2. Russicklall Mitter, zeminder.
3. Treepoorachurn Seekdar, teacher at the Madrissa College.
4. Obhoychurn Mookerjee, merchant.
5. Sookmoy Bannerjee, merchant.

6. Kissublall Ghose, merchant.
7. Mustard oil Manufactory.
8. Jugguthchunder Mookerjee, zemindar.
9. Gobindochunder Sircar, produce broker.
10. Sectakanto Bannerjee, cloth merchant.
11. A temple of Boloram.
12. Doorgadass Newgee.
13. Ramkinker Bhattacharjee, Hindoo priest.
14. Romanauth Siromony, pundit at the Hindoo Metropolitan College.
15. Manufactory for dyeing and printing chintz.
16. Peareemohun Ghose, darogah at Penaspotta.
17. Ramjoy Torcoluncar, pundit of the Supreme Court.
18. Huts.
19. Maharaja Gourbullub Bahadoor.
20. Choytonnoochunder Ghose, brick merchant.

#### RAJAH NOBOKISSEN'S STREET

1. Huts.
2. Rajah Sibkristo Bahadoor.  
Rajah Kalleekristo Bahadoor.  
Rajah Dabeekristo Bahadoor.  
Rajah Opperbokristo Bahadoor.  
Rajah Nurrendurkristo Bahadoor.  
Rajah Komulkristo Bahadoor.  
Horokally Ghose, Vakeel, in Sudder Dewany Adawlat.
3. Kristosokha Ghose, dewan to Rajah Sibkristo Bahadoor.  
Kistojobun Ghose, dewan to Rajah Sibkristo Bahadoor.
4. Cocoolkissen Deb, naib dewan of the Bank of Bengal.
5. Premnarain Doss' dispensary.
6. Huts.
7. Doorgachurn Chatterjee, Hindoo priest.
8. Gungaram Gangooly, Capts' banian.
9. Huts.
10. Nobocoomar Torcoloncar, spiritual guide.
11. Modoosoodun Singhee, zemindar.
12. Sampookur Tank.
13. Nobokissen Raha, head writer in the Chief Engineer's Office.
14. Huts.
15. Roy Prosonnonarain Deb Bahadoor, dewan of Moorshedabad.

16. Huts.
17. Rajah Radokanto Bahadoor & Sons.  
Coomar Rajendronarain Bahadoor.  
Coomar Debendronarain Bahadoor.  
Coomar Mohendronarain Bahadoor.
18. Huts.

OKHIL MISTRY'S LANE

1. Mrs. Russel.
2. Rajnarain Mistry, painter.
3. Rajnarain Doss, asst. to W. G. Compion, attorney.
4. Ramnarain Doss, asst. to Denman and Abbott, attorneys.
5. Ramjeebun Rama, organ repairer.
7. Ramnarainchunder's cabinet-yard.
8. Nitanund Doss, musical instrument repairer.
9. Sideshurchunder's timber godown.
10. Anundo Curmokar, goldsmith.
11. Modhoosoodun Acheree, brush maker.
12. Soroopchunder Shah, opium shop.
13. Mudhoosoodun Sircar, comb-maker.
14. Potitpauban Pal, engraver.
15. Poitill Doss, engraver upon steel, H. C. mint.
16. Ramjoo Doss, money-lender.
17. Poran Kurmokar, jeweller.

NEEMTOILLA GHAUT STREET

1. Huts.
2. Ramdhon Bysack, banker.
3. Juggonath Sen, sub-assistant surgeon.  
Ramnarain Sen, medical practitioner.
4. Joynarain Coberaj, native doctor.
5. Sibchunder Sircar, landholder.
6. Sibkristo Banerjee, banian at Smith, Farie and Co.
7. Ramchund Bannerjee, banian to P. J. Paul, attorney.
8. The Free Church of Scotland Institution.
9. Porankisto Sen, landholder.
10. Huts and native shops.
11. Bissessur Dutt, zemindar.
12. Huts and native shops.
13. A Mahomedan Mosque.

14. Chunam Shops.
15. Wholesale grain shops.
16. Joygopaul Roy, chuman merchant.
17. Mohanundo Bysack, landholder.
18. Wholesale grain shops.
19. Oomeshchunder Roy, sugar merchant.
20. Grain shops.
21. Peareechand Mittre, Secretary of Public Library.
22. Temples of Shiva.
23. Huts.

#### DURMAHATTA STREET

[The original numbers in the Directory have been retained here.]

1. Gopal Mullick's Posta [warehouse on river bank]—shops of gunny bags, sweetmeats, spices, etc.
- 2 to 4. Shops of iron cooking pans, curry stone mills, earthen pots, etc.
5. Casseenaath Baboo's Posta.
6. Goverdhun Doss, landholder.
0. Shops of iron bars, etc. A tomb of Peer Sajumma.
0. The Rajah of Burdwan's chowk and bazar. Meerbuhur Ghaut.

... Here Nawab's Street ...

8. A temple of Juggernaut.
10. Mufter Suddel Khan, vakeel of the Nawab of Moorsheda-bad.
12. Money-changer's shop.
13. Beerchunder Sircar, gunny bag shop.
14. Thakoordass Shah, mustard oil shop.
15. Raja Sookmoy's Posta.
16. A range of shops of oil.
17. Shops of gunny bags.
- 18 to 25. Shops of wooden tray, etc.
26. Raja Kalee Coomar Mullick.
27. A Temple of Shiva.
- 28 to 29. New Bazar of Prosonocoomar Tagore.
30. Sumbhoochunder Sahoy, grain shop.
- Bissumbhur Khan, ditto.

31. Nittanundo Mundul, ditto.
- Roopchund Paramanick, ditto.
- 32 to 34. Mothoorakanth Shah, jute merchant.
35. Prosunnocoomar Tagore's barracks and godowns.
  0. Huts and petty shops of grain.
- 36 to 40. Nabolall Mokerjee, linseed merchant.
41. Gopalchunder Sadkhan, long pepper merchant.
  0. Radhakanth, Hindoo idol.
42. Rajkisto Carpherma, merchant.
43. A goldsmith's shop.
- 44 & 45. Mothoorakanth Chowdry, merchant.
46. Shops of mats.
  0. Gooroodos Das, old iron merchant.
47. Shops of teak planks and timber.
48. Brojomohun Dutt, teak timber merchant.
  0. Shops of timber, etc.
  0. Money-changers' shops.

... Here Neemtollah Ghaut Street ...

55. Ramchunder Dass, grain shop.
  0. Bamboo depots.
  0. Aheereettollah Ghaut.
57. Gobindochunder Pal, ghee merchant.
  - Nobinchunder Dass, wheat shop.
  - Denonath Dutt, rice shop.
  0. Several grain merchants.
  - Dhurmotollah Ghaut.
58. Petty grain shops.
59. Bholonath Coondoo, salt merchant.
60. Radaramun Singee, rice merchant.
61. Bissoroo Kur, grain and rice merchant.
62. Nabinchunder Singee, grain and rice merchant.
63. Salt Chowkey.
64. Debnath Kur, salt merchant.
65. Bissonath Dutt, grain merchant.
66. to 68. Several grain merchants.
69. Moteelall Sett, linseed merchant.
70. Salt merchant.
- 71 to 74. Several grain merchants.
75. Teencowree China, salt merchant.

- 76. Ramkristo Doss, grain merchant.
- 77 to 78. Several grain merchants.
- 79. Madhub Chunder Singh, grain merchant.
- Ramnursing Dutt, grain merchant.
- 83. Ruth Ghaut.
- ... Here Sobha Bazar Street ...
- 84. Ramnarain Singh and Jodoonat Singh, merchant.
- 85 to 89. Grain merchants.
- 90. Ramdhun Dey, salt merchant.
- 91. Cally Prosono Mookerjee, linseed merchant.
- 93. ... Here Benecetollah Street ...
- 94. Gooroochurn Singhe, rice merchant.
- 96. Nobocoomar Kur, merchant.
- 97. Degumber Mitter, linseed merchant.
- 98. Joshoerup Meherchand, merchant.
- 99. Bholanath Coondoo, merchant.
- 100 & 101. Grain shops.
- 102. Bancemadhub Core, wheat merchant.
- 103 & 104. Petty shops of dhall, ghee and salt.
- 104. ... Here Nauther Bagaun Street ...
- 108. Hautkholah Bazar.
- 109. Petty shops of grain.
- 110 to 112. Shops of jute and gunny bags.
- ... Here Ahereetollah Street ...
- 113. Roopnarain Roy, steam ferry proprietor.
- 115 to 117. Hurradhun Sadkhan, grain merchant.
- 118. Shops of grain and jute.
- 119 & 120. Petty shops of gunny bags, jute, rope, etc.
- 121. Mungul Aus, money-lender.
- 122 to 124. Shops of gunny bags.
- 124-6. Tarrucknath Dutt, banian.
- 124-6. Rateekapersaud Dutt, cash-keeper of the Bengal Bank.
- 125. Sadhoochurn Sapooe, grain merchant.
- Mr. Peter's New Babar.
- The Idol Puchanun.
- 127. Shreemunt Mundle, grain merchant.

128. Joynarain Dutt, ditto.  
129. Rajnarain Coomar, ditto.  
130 to 133. Shops of grain, salt, gunny bags, jute, etc.  
134. ... Here Nimtollah Street ...  
138 to 142. Shops of timber and planks.  
143. Shops of mats.  
144. Yard of teak planks.  
145. Liquor shop.  
146. ... Here Jore Bagaun Street ...  
147 & 148. Jute godowns.  
149. Roghonath Sen and Kistochunder Paramanick, merchants.  
150. Rajkisto Carpherma.  
153. Loknath Shaw, merchant.  
154. ... Here Mundul Street ...  
155. Petumber Coondoo, grain merchant.  
156. ... Here Puttorea Ghaut Street ...  
159 to 161. Shops of planks.  
162. ... Here Durpunarayan Thakoor's Street ...  
163. Shops of dyers.  
164. Boloram Biswas, wine merchant.  
165. Debendernath Thakoor, writer at the Treasury.  
166 to 169. Raja Nursingchunder Roy.  
... Here Ruttun Sircar's Garden Street ...  
170. Shops of gunny bags.  
170-1. Sibnarain Paul, merchant.  
170-4. Obenas Gangooly, head clerk, Receiver's office.  
... Here Sobharam Bysak's Street ...  
172 to 173. Shops of tobacco leaf, bar iron, etc.  
174. A Thakoor Baree.  
Shops of gunny bags, iron, etc.  
179. Rajcoomar Sett, landowner.  
180. Shops of old iron, and tobacco leaf.  
... Here Banstollah Street ...



181. Liquor shop.

... Here Meerbuhur Ghaut Street ...

182 to 185. Shops of spices, paint and iron bar, etc.

185. ... Here Cotton Street ...

186. Gocool Dass' choke [chowk].

187. Shops of iron nails, hinges, etc.

#### BHOWANEETPORE ROAD, SOUTH OF CHOWRINGHEE ROAD

Liquor, taree, bhoonawalla, moody, and firewood shops.

Keranchee stand.

Sutty Peer-ka-Durgah.

Mohurry Choiton Coondoo's Bazar ... here on the right a road runs to Kidderpore Bridge ... here on the left a road runs to Malye Busty ...

London Missionary Society's Institution.

[Names of some missionaries mentioned.]

Paul Shaha, Surgeon dentist.

Hurrishchander Mookherjea, senior asst. in Military Examiner's Office.

Chundychurn Mookerjea, asst. in ditto.

Shoe-maker's shops.

Heeralall Seal's jull tonghee and garden.

Soroop Poddar's bagan, busty of huts and native shops.

Groodoss Sein, peishkar, High Court.

Singhee's bagan, huts.

A tank.

Nulogopaul Mullick, peishkar, High Court.

Kadarnath Mullick, sheristadar of the Judge's Court, 24 Pgs.

Nundun Brother's Academy.

Vydonath Misser, pundit, High Court.

Radhanath Bose, pleader, High Court.

Jagoo Baboo's Bazar.

Southern vaccine depot.

Jadubchunder Ghose, sub-assistant surgeon in-charge.

Sunbhoonath Pundit Roy Bahadoor, senior govt. pleader in Appellate [Side] High Court.

Anundchunder Bose, deputy register in the Appellate [side] High Court.

Radhanath Bose, firm of Albert (?) and Bose, attorneys, 6 Hare Street.

... here Chuckerbair Road ...

Womesh Chunder Doss, assistant examiner in the Auditor General's Office.

Shoe-makers', money-changers' etc. shop.

Kaleepersand Roy Chowdry, supervisor in Civil Architect's Office.

Hurrishunder Chatterjee, head asst. in the [office of] examiner of Ordanance accounts, etc.

Sumbhoo Chunder Chatterjee, assistant in the Accountant General's Office.

Juddoonath Dey, head inspector, delivery dept., Calcutta Post Office.

Rausmoney Dassees' bagan, busty of huts.

A large tank.

Rausmoney Dassees' Bazar.

Chunder Madub Ghose, pleader in Appellate [Side] High Court.

... Here Pakertollah Lane ... spice, copper utensil, etc. shops.

Here on the right runs the Alipore Road and on the left the Ballygunge Road ...

In Paker Tollah Lane.

Ramchunder Mitter, broker.

Tarapersand Chowdry, zamindar.

Nilmony Mitter, moonsiff and deputy magistrate of Howrah.

Bhowaneepore Police Thana, Section I.

In Chuckerbair Street.

Jadub Chunder Mitter, 2nd. Oordoo translator in the Sudder Dewanny Adawlat.

Mohes Chunder Chowdry, pleader of Appellate [Side] High Court.

Radhagobind Mullick, deputy treasurer in Agra Bank.

Bhowaneepore Brahmoh Sumaj.

Harran Chunder Mookerjee, secretary.

Grees Chunder Mitter, pleader in the Judge's Court, 24 Pgs.

Juggodanund Mookerjee, junior govt. pleader in the Appellate  
[Side] High Court.

Poorochunder Banerjee, assistant, High Court.

Womesh Chunder Mitter, zemindar.

Rajender Mitter, firm of Arson and Co., wine merchants, etc.

Moonshee Habeebull Hossein, zemindar.

A. Vallente, assistant, Revenue Board.

Gobindchunder Dutt, copyist in the Board of Revenue Office.

Keranchee Stand.

Surroop Chunder Dutt, acctt. in office of Commissariat Accounts.

Pearylall Mundul's Bazar.

... Here the road to Ballygune ...

Modoosooden Bachasputty, govt. pensioner.

Ram Narain Bhattacharjee, pundit of Allipore Magistrate's Court.

Govindpersand Bose, head clerk in Allipore Magistrate's Office.

Rice golahs, spices, betelnuts, etc., shops.

Tarapersand Banerjee, asst. in Director [General] of Post Offices.

Sreenath Banerjee, head assistant, Office of Compiler of Post  
Office Accounts.

... Here the road to Allipore ...

Oriental Medical Hall.

Callydoss Bose, proprietor ditto.

Romesh Chunder Chatterjee, third English Translator in High  
Court.

Hurro Chunder Doss, assistant in the Acctt. General's Office.

Shamachurn Banerjee, head assistant in the Post Master General's  
Office.

Dwarkanath Paulit, translator, High Court.

Saul beams, rafters, soap, etc., shops.

... Here runs the road to Kalee Ghaut and Chitlah Haut ...

Post Office receiving box.

Koylas Chunder Bose, asst., Agra Bank.

Sagur Nath Bose, cashier in the Bengal Printing Co.

Khetter Nath Bose, pleader, High Court.

Mohendranath Bose, additional sudder moonsiff of Allipore.

Judge's court.

Juggobundo Ghosal, asst., Bengal Accountant's Office.

Issenchunder Ghose, asst., Military Examiner's Office.

Bhowaneepore Dispensary.

Gopal Chunder Dutt, surgeon and superintendent in-charge.

A large tank.

... Here continues the road to Tollygunge ...

From: *The New Calcutta Directory*, 1863

## APPENDIX VI

### SOME PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM AREAS IN MID-19TH CENTURY CALCUTTA

Some of the areas listed below had mixed Muslim-Eurasian population.

#### NAZEER NUJUBOLAH'S LANE

1. Mahomed Allah Dad, 3rd. master of the Madrissa College.
2. Persian and Arabic Printing Press, Moonshee Mahomed Tubraze.
3. Moonshee Amcer Alec, pleader of the Sudder Court.
4. Moulvee Abdoolah, English translator.
5. Moulvee Serajooddeen, zemindar.
6. Cazeer Wadi Hossain, ditto.
7. Mrs. Nicolson.

#### GUDAE KHANSAMA'S LANE

1. Moulvee Miramut Hossein Khan, vakeel at the Sudder Court.
2. Moulvee Abdoolah, Persian and Arabic printing press.
3. Hofaz Mahomed Suddick, molla.
4. Sheikh Pootoo, zemindar.

#### KORABURDAR STREET

1. Khaju Abdool Baree, minister for the Mahomedans, appointed by Government.
2. R. O. C. Bowler, Extra Preventive Service, Custom House.
3. Mrs. E. Lakin.
4. S. Northan, zemindar.
5. H. Baker, asst., Mackenzie, Lyall and Co.

#### MOULVEE GHOLAM SOBHAN'S LANE

1. Moulvee Khul Ryhoman, zemindar.
2. John Anderson, bailiff, Allipore Judges Court.
3. Shaik Tinnoo, zemindar.
4. Moulvee Mohomed Mather, zemindar.
5. Moulvee Rymun Ally, mooktear in Sudder Dewanny Adawlat.
7. Mrs. Rymer F. Rymer, asst. in Chief Engineer's Office.

MOULVEE IMDAD ALEE'S LANE

3. F. G. Polter, examiner in Correspondence Dept., Post Office.
- 9.1 Moulvee Mahomed Moozadur, zemindar.
32. J. L. Madge, draftsman, Engineer's Office, Fort William.
0. Huts.
39. Biramdec Mullick, tanner.

BOODHOO OOSTAGUR'S LANE

1. Kader Khansama, zemindar.
2. Burkutoolah, sirdar of all the coolies.

CHUCKOO KHANSAMA'S LANE

1. Huts.
2. Sheik Rupon, merchant.
3. A musjeed.
4. Haroo Khansama's jelly Shop.
5. Huts occupied by Khansamas.

TOLTOLLAH LANE

1. Huts.
2. Mrs. Ahmuty.
3. Sheik Hossain, zemindar.
4. Mrs. Lawler.
5. J. Martyr.
6. Shaik Kullymoody, zemindar.
7. H. F. James, asst. in Military Dept.
8. Mrs. Scott.
9. Lalla Sohon Lall, mooktear, Sudder Dewanny Adawlat.
10. Moulvee Abdoolahud, zemindar.
11. Moonshee Ramchurn Lallah, mookhtear, Sudder Dewanny Adawlat.
12. G. Pottinger, draftsman and compiler, Surveyor-General's Office.
13. Mrs. Sanderson.
14. Huts.
15. W. Smith, asst., Financial Dept.
16. Here European Asylum Lane.
17. P. H. D'Mello, sub-auditor, Audit Office Dept.
18. Here Toltollah Bazar Street.

19. G. A. Simpson.
20. F. R. Boyce, writer in Chief Engineer's Office, L.P. \*
21. Huts.
22. J. Wood Jr., record-keeper in Military Dept.
23. Huts.
24. Mahomedan mosque.
25. J. M. Stevens, engineer, E. I. Railway Company.
26. Huts and butchers' shops.
27. Huts.
28. P. Rose, engineer, Str. Jas. Soames.
29. Sheik Munneer, coach and palkeemaker.
30. Huts.

## NOOR MAHOMED SIRKAR'S LANE

1. Moonshee Golam Akbar, draftsman in Surveyor-General's Office.
2. Romanath Dutt, merchant.
3. Here Okhil Mistry's Lane.
4. Bissonath Surnokar, goldsmith.
5. Dabee Surnokar, goldsmith.

## MOONSHEE DEDAR BUX'S LANE

1. F. Oehme, pleader in the Court of Small Causes.
2. Mrs. S. Ball, midwife.
3. Huts.
4. T. Rutledge, record-keeper in the Home Department.
5. Moulvee Mirza Wuzeer Ally, mookhtear to the Rajah of Putteah.
6. Miss E. B. Harrington.
7. I. J. D'Mello, record-keeper, Marine Superintendent's Office.  
W. D'Mello, asst., ditto.
8. Moonshee Emam Ally Khan, zemindar.
9. Nawab Riza Khooly Khan, of Lucknow.
10. J. W. Twalling, asst., Financial Department.
11. Mrs. M. D. Lawrie.

## SYID SALIH'S LANE

1. Huts.
2. Allahe Bux, hair-chain & wig-maker.
3. Huts.

MOONSHEE SUDDUROODEEN'S STREET

1. Lascars' lodgings.
2. Omergee Serang, merchant.
3. A Mahomedan mosque.
4. Myna Bye, dancing girl.
5. Ticca Sing, milliner.
6. Bussurut Ally, Mahomedan doctor.
7. Huts and native shops.
8. Petty shops of cloth, etc.

MOONSHEE ALLIM OOLLA'S LANE

1. C. B. M. Jacobs, music ware-house & repairer of musical instruments.
2. Mahomedan mosque.
3. Moulvee Abdool Luteef Khan Bahadoor, deputy-magistrate.
4. W. Richards, Customs preventive officer.
5. Moonshee Fuzzul Hossain, mookhtear, Sudder Dewanny Adawlat.

MISREE KHANSAMA'S LANE

1. Koongra-ka-Musjeed.
2. Huts.
3. Mahomedan mosque.
4. Huts.

PEEROO KHANSAMA'S LANE

1. Mrs. Sissmore.
2. Family house of Abdool Luteef Khan Bahadoor, deputy-magistrate of Beerbhoom.
3. Doarnauth Khansamah, zemindar.
4. D. B. Goodall, asst., Military Board Office.
5. Moulvee Hyder Ally.
6. Moulvee Abdool Baree, 6th master in Madrissa College.
7. Thomas Leigh, builder and carpenter.
8. Mrs. A Butler.
9. Sheik Peroo, zemindar.
10. Mrs. Ilayten.
11. G. Robinson.
12. E. Goodall, asst., Accountant-General's Office.



## APPENDIX VII

### A PEDDLING COMMUNITY—THE ARMENIANS

In a recent significant work on the history of trade between Europe and Asia—*Carracks, Caravans and Companies*—the author, Niels Steensgaard, reinforces the image of the pedlar in Asian trade, though in a modified form, from Van Leur's presentation. Van Leur—the author of the classic work *Indonesian Trade and Society*—was primarily concerned with a historical constant and a sociological model after Weber. But his insights, according to Steensgaard, are very useful for a historian. Steensgaard significantly starts his chapter on peddling trade with illustrations from the journal of an Armenian merchant of the late 17th century. The persistence of the peddling activity alongside the new entrepreneurial forms, represented by the English, Dutch and other chartered companies, can be profusely illustrated, especially from the testamentary records in the custody of the Calcutta High Court. The peddling sector was a highly interesting element in the physical set-up of historic Calcutta and had a degree of historical dynamism till about the early decades of the 19th century. The Armenians along with the Greeks and Mughals (the Turko-Iranian ethnic group) constituted the most significant element in the sector. The Armenians, however, had a more far-flung trade network than any other peddling community and had a stronger penchant for leaving documents of their activities. The following selections from the Mayor's Court and Supreme Court records in Calcutta are made on the basis of their representative nature out of a mass of such documents available from the mid-18th century.

#### I

Ovanis Bogdazer and his wife admr. of Johannes Minas Decd.  
agt.

Hajee Kerim

7th March, 1769

#### EXHIBIT A

Hajee Kerim in account current with Johannes Aga Minas in  
Bengal

20 chests of rose water at 40 Rs. (November, 1759)	Rs. 800
One emerald	Rs. 400
A pair of looking glasses	Rs. 400
Bales shipped on board the Danish sloop (February, 1760)	
Fruits by Coja Mirza	
2 chests of rose water (June, 1761)	Rs. 96
20 pearls at 122½ rupees each (November, 1759)	Rs. 2450

#### EXHIBIT B

In the year 1757 the 9th February I Hajee Kerim have shipped on board the Dutch ship called Capt. Rozbom 21 bales to be delivered at Bussora to Coja Johannes Aga Minas, this being the copy (or trs.) of the above invoice which wrote (*sic*) here in the Armenian language.

List of 21 bales of cloth containing 5218 pieces (including Dacca Baftas), valued at 32,398 rupees, follows. Also mentioned are small bales containing 58 pieces of cloth valued at Rs. 709.

#### EXHIBIT C

Account sale of the goods belonging to Hajee Kerim, 7th March, 1769.

To cash paid charges for landing the 21 bales at Bombay Rs. 63.

To duty paid on 20 bales of goods at Bussora Rs. 3613.

To deliver the goods to Khiddar Chalaby and receive of him Bussora Pangemell rupees for the said goods, if he pays in gold mohurs I receive Mamud Shaw Pangemell mohurs at 87¼ Mohamedy each and Nadery mohurs at 79 Mohamedy each.

To cash remitted you in a treasure chest on board the English ship belonging to Captain Lene (?), Rs. 4000 to be delivered in Bengal to Coja Mirza who should deliver to you . . .

To Mr. Aga Ibrahim

Sir,

The sum of 12000 rupees which is debited in your account (the money left at Bussora) is safely arrived at Surat in the hands of Coja Petrus Bogram by the English ship called Dragon and the

ship belonging to Chilaby called Sulaimony as per information given in two ships by said Coja Petrus Bogram of the safe arrival thereof but till this time the said money is not come yet to my hands in order to have it delivered to you, yet I have wrote in the monsoon to that gentleman that as it became difficult to obtain there bills of exchange therefore he should remit the said money by the ships if he thinks proper or by bills of exchange.

[Signature missing]

#### EXHIBIT D

To cash left in the hands of Messers Arratoon and rupees 12,000 to be remitted . . . to Surat on board the ships bound to Surat to be delivered there to Coja Petrus Bogram who should remit the same to Bengall to Coja Mirza and myself by bills of exchange.

To cash that Hajee Mohomed who purchased a bale of Baftas at Carah was unable to pay the money. Therefore I took of him 20 pearls on account of said bale and the remainder to be paid in ready money at 122.8 each pearl.

#### Sale of goods

Total prime Cost	Rs. 26,518 - 8
Profit on ditto at 75 p.c.	Rs. 19,888 - 14
Profit and Principal	Rs. 46,407 - 6
<i>Deduct</i> commission and dullalage [brokerage] 8%	Rs. 2,552 - 0
	<hr/> Rs. 43,855 - 6

#### II

#### COJA SARHAD AGAINST COJA KACTON 16TH DECEMBER 1755

Swore Coja Arratoon,

Do you know what amount of money Coja Kacton took up, borrowed and received from Coja Sarhad on or about January 19th 1755? If yea, whether the said money was taken at [blurred] interest or whether or not the said money was to run at respondentia and is to be paid at Madras; if yea, whether or no premium of ten rupees was not added to the principal sum received at the time.

*Answer:* Yes, he knows Coja Kacton took up from Coja Sarhad 95 Arcot rupees to run at respondentia to Madras on Capt. Thomas an Armenian then to become payable at the rate of 20 rupees premium on the said sum but the said Captain meeting with bad weather did not proceed on the voyage.

Do you or any one of you know whether Coja Kacton supplied Coja Sarhad with a shawl for the waist, two Armenian coats and two handkerchiefs?

*Answer:* Yes, Coja Kacton sold Coja Sarhad a waist shawl for 17 rupees, two jamahs and two handkerchiefs, the jamahs for 5 rupees and the handkerchiefs for 2 - 8 - 0.

Do you know whether or no Coja Kacton paid the Zaminderi's peons five Arcot rupees on account of Coja Sarhad; if yea, at what time and for what persons?

*Answer:* It was paid on account of a complaint made by the Culpee Banyan to that Cutchery against Coja Sarhad.

*Cross-examined:*

When the 24 rupees was paid the Culpee Banyan did you hear what it was for or [was it] for the redemption of a chest belonging to Sarhad pawned by Thomas while at Culpee?

*Answer:* Yes, it was paid to redeem a chest pawned at Culpee to the Banyan by Capt. Thomas to secure payment of that sum being the price of a slave which chest and slave he Coja hath since delivered to him which slave the said Coja Sarhad has since held.

### III

A will made in Armenian on 10th April 1758 was translated from Armenian into Portuguese by Gabriel son of Wannis and was translated from Portuguese to English by Anthony Mumiz.

Translation of the last will and testament of Coja Cochun deceased . . .

In the month of May, 1740 on my first coming out from Ispahan . . . I have received of Coja Nazar the sum of Rs. 320/- . . . I gave him my bond.

On my first arrival at Madras in September 1740 Coja Petrus Wooshan employed me as his Gomastah. He advanced me Arcot Rs. 18000 (?) and I myself put in same stock Arcot Rs. 1500.

## IV

In the name of God amen I Avock D. Arratoon of the Town of Calcutta inhabitant and Armenian Merchant, being sick in body but of good and perfect memory/thanks be to God/do make this my last will and Testament in the manner and form following . . .

Sometime ago I received of Thomas Boddam Esq. the sum of six thousand arcot rupees and two thousand which I had then in my hands belonging to my wife which I with the above six thousand making in the whole the sum of eight thousand arcot rupees which said sum of eight thousand arcot rupees, it was agreed by and between me and the said Thomas Boddam Esq. that the said sum should be laid out to purchase sundry piece goods and other goods etc. for and on account of our joint account and the profits arisen thereon is to be shared shared and shared alike.

The above sum of two thousand rupees belonging to my wife/ Disheurn/as above mentioned it's my will that the same sum with the profits that has or may arise thereon be remitted to my said wife at what place soever she may reside.

It is also my further will that the profits which may arise to my share out of the other two thousand rupees from the sum of eight thousand rupees as above mentioned shall be remitted to my said wife to and for the use of defraying sundry expenses which she has been at for herself and two of my children for bringing them from Esphan to Bussorah.

I was indebted to one Coja Minnas Ellis on Bond in the sum of three thousand rupees which said Minnas Ellis sometime ago stop'd monies belonging to me to the amount of three thousand five hundred rupees and upwards so that there will on balance of accounts remaining an overplus of about the sum of five hundred rupees which said sum of five hundred rupees or thereabouts I desire the said Coja Minnas Ellis [deliver] to my Trustees hereafter named. The bond for the amount of the above three thousand rupees still remains in the said Minnas Ellis'.

hands which I also desire him to deliver up to my said trustees to be cancelled as the same being paid off and discharged as above mentioned.

I am indebted to Johwanness Peraton on Bond in the sum of three thousand one hundred and thirty-six rupees or thereabouts which has been standing about five years and as I have laid an account of the Estimate of my losses before the gentleman commissioners appointed for examining the losses of the Armenian inhabitants to the amount of eight hundred rupees or thereabouts it is my will that whatever my said account of losses may be passed for that the same be paid to the said Johwanness Peraton or his attorney Coja Arratoon Merzabeck in order to discharge part of what I justly stand indebted to him. There is a written agreement made between me and one Coja Augustin D Pedro of the said Town of Calcutta Armenian Merchant which I now declare the same to stand good and valid and the monies and profits that may arise therefrom I desire it may be delivered to my wife as is mentioned in the said agreement.

I acknowledge to have received sundry sums of monies from sundry persons to buy and purchase sundry goods at [blurred] for them and as Coja Arratoon Owanniss is very well acquainted with most of all my affairs I desire and request the said Arratoon Owanniss will deliver to every person their respective goods together with their accounts as it will clearly appear in my books. To my two slaves I give them their liberty and also give to each of them to be paid by my trustees hereafter named the sum of Arcot rupees fifty.

All the best residue and remainder of my Estate whatever I give and bequeath unto my wife and my two daughters to be shared shared and shared alike amongst them. Also I appoint my said wife and two daughters to be exccutrixes of this my last will and testament and the church wardens for the time being of the Holy Church of St. Nazareth together with Arratoon Owanniss I make and ordain to be overseers or trustees of this my last will and Testament. . . .

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal in Calcutta this twenty-second day of December one thousand seven hundred and fifty-eight.

## V

Ref: Will Register 1805-1807 H.C.O.S. .

Will of Parsadan the son of Cosrove of the family of Metzorane(?) of Gore(?).

I am at present possessed of 23 pairs of Cashmere shawls, one pair of unbleached sheets and ten shawl handkerchiefs and whatever other sundry effects there may be belonging to me after my decease he (my executor) is to sell the whole and out of the proceeds thereof is to pay my debts [mentions debts to Aga Johannes by a bond of Rs. 1000, Arratoon Michael of Dacca Rs. 800 and Rs. 50, Rs. 15, and Rs. 10 (the first two names are Armenian, the third name is Greek) to three persons respectively]. But I earnestly beseech the above-named my creditors to have compassion on me and to give up the interest on the several sums...

I am indebted to Parren Gabriel the son of Arratoon of the family of Morand of Cassilvan the sum of 150 Toomans and on account of this my partnership paper remains in possession of that gentleman. After paying off the above debts if there should be any residue of my estates he (my executor) is to pay that gentleman and to receive back from him my partnership paper writing. After paying this sum if there should still remain any money, he is to remit the same to my brother.

I am ashamed before all my relations, my Church, the Priests, and my friends because I have been toiling all this time and have got nothing. I beg they will excuse me. I am ashamed before everyone of them and so forth and after my decease they are to have me interred in the Aremanian Burying ground of Calcutta near my uncle [mother's brother] Bajaan(?). . . .

Done at Calcutta . . . Year 1805.

Joseph Stephenus have written this and I am a witness.

A true translation. May 2nd 1805.

## VI

Will of Solomon David—as the St. Paul saith that testament [is] of force after men are dead—

I Solomon son of David the native of Bagdad do confess and declare before God in the presence of priests and other people . . .

First of all I appoint Padre Caitano the commissary Mr. Petrus son of Arratoon and Andreas son of Padre Karrapeat to be my general and effectual executors. Further I declare that I have no Book or Account of any kind therefore I thought it necessary to declare my conjectures by my tongue viz.—I have a parcel of goods at Bussorah in the possession of Hajee Ismoyeel. The Bill of lading and letters of reception of the said goods remain in my hand—

I have also goods on Board the Manila Snow consigned to the captain of the said Snow and the Bill of lading lays in my hand—

I have also demands upon other people whose bonds and accounts remain in my possession. I have gold sealed up and placed in the hands of Padre Caitano which the aforesaid Andreas is well known in this affair. [Instructs his executors to recover his whole estate and to pay his lawful debts: the remainder of his estate should be made into ten parts and bequeathed to the daughters of his brothers, the sons of his sister, the Church of Bagdad, the Church of Bussorah and the Christian poor of Bagdad. His father's property he bequeathed to the daughters of his brother. Bequeathed his three rings, diamond, emerald and ruby to his executors. Bequeathed also one thousand rupees to Eginah the daughter of Phanus as a remembrance. The remaining parts of his estates should be put into the 'Company's cash to run at interest' and his house where he lived to be let out and the interest and the rent to be joined together and his other house to be built. The interest of parts of his estate together with the rent of the two houses to be sent and reached year to year to two daughters of his brother.]

"... whosoever should offer to do anything more or less than these I set forth herein shall be charged with abundance of sins in the day of Judgement of Christ being ended in the Styll minor of 149 Tamah 24th in the year 1764 November the 20th in Calcutta"—Filed on 20th April 1805. [Legacies mainly to different churches in India Rs. 10,000.]



## VII

I Sri Khajai Neeose Marcaeer Pagose an inhabitant of Armoney Tolah within the city of Dacca.

My father and mother were born in the country of Irrann. I was born in this country. I do in sound understanding in right mind in the possession of my senses and faculties in the name of Sri Sri Issore the Supreme God hereby declare my last will. That I have no hopes of life for which reason I am about to indite this my last will that is Testament. Of my Zamindary and Talooks and Niz Talooks and Niz house and houses by purchase and conditional Mehals and Farms in my proper and in other names appertaining to the Zillah of Bakurganj and Zillah Maimansing and Zillah Treepoorah and Zillah Dacca Jaulolpoore and my own dwelling house and other houses in the city of Dacca and lands rent bearing and rent free and other property and household articles and gold and silver and jurrow [set with stones] ornaments and copper and bellmetal and iron and brass and wooden furnitures and clothes silken and woollen and Europe and articles of glassware etcetera and ready money and Bank notes and Promissory notes and securities and bonds and bills . . . [Refers to his sons as Srman [blurred] daughters Srimotee Wooche Bebee and Lucy Bebee and his wife Srimotee Catherina Bebee as heirs.]

Date of the will—9th December 1829.

## VIII

Ref: Will Register 1777-1780 H.C.O.S. Book No. 2, page 205-20

Name of the testator: Arratoon Mirzabeg

I do confess before the Holy Trinity the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost and before the blessed Virgin Mary and all saints with my conscience this is my last will and testament according to the orders of Apostle that a Testament is of force after men are dead now I Arratoon being of Armenian Nation a native of New Erenan (?) in Julpha son of Mirzabeg of the religion of St. Gregory and submit to the Cathedral Church called Echmiazin. . . . I the said Arratoon in the year of our Saviour 1742 and styl minor 127 set out from Isphin and arrived at Bengal and in

1757 the year of our Lord . . . my spouse with her mother came to Bengal on account of the disturbance in our country we remained in this place to the day of the undermentioned date. My last request is this that they shall depart from this country whilst my sons are young and go to Prussia Germany or other countries . . . that they might learn the rules and customs of the said places it will be much better for them.

Date of the will—8th June 1776.

## APPENDIX VIII

### THE MUGHAL COMMUNITY IN CALCUTTA

“The name Mogul [Mughal] should properly mean a person of the great nomad race of Mongols, called in Persia etc. Mughals; but in India it has come, in connection with the nominally Mongol, though essentially rather Turk, family of Baber, to be applied to all foreign Mahommadans from the countries on the west and north-west of India, except the Pathans. In fact these people themselves make a sharp distinction between the Mughal Irani (who is a Shia) and the Mughal Turani of Turk origin (who is a Sunni).” *Hobson-Jobson* (1968 ed.), p. 570.

Aurangzeb, in *Anecdotes*, refers to their unique position in Mughal India as kinsmen of the ruling dynasty and as an unusually strong people to be carefully watched, because of their ambition. Even though the Gujaratis, Khattris and Oswals were the premier merchant communities in 18th century India, the Mughals probably enjoyed the aura of the mercantile aristocracy, mainly because of their aggressive militaristic qualities and cosmopolitan cultural and linguistic association.

A consciousness of their privileges prompted the Mughals in the army of the former ruler of Oudh to send a Paper of Articles to a British commander on the question of continuing their services in the armed forces of the East India Company.

- (1) The Company should in every respect regard as its own the honour and reputation of the Mughals, who are strangers in this country, and make them its confederates in every business.
- (2) They should be granted a proper place in the country for the habitation of their families and dependants.
- (3) Whereas sixty rupees a month have been fixed for all but Jamadars, Hawaldars, and Dafahdars, there are several privates who have always been distinguished and have received from one to three hundred rupees a month.
- (4) Whatever Mughals, whether Iranis or Turanis, come to offer their services, they should be received on the aforesaid terms. Moreover, a present of Rs. 100 per head should be immediately given them and a month's pay advanced them.
- (5) At present there should not be raised any difficulties as to

the size of horses. (6) Whenever a Mughal is killed in battle or dies a natural death, his son or relation should be received in his place. . . . (8) Should anyone be desirous of returning to his own country, his arrears should be immediately paid. [Trans. P.L.R. 1763-64, no. 246, pp. 491-92] *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, vol. 1., pp. 342-43 No. 2423; Paper of Articles sent by the Mughals to Major Munro.

The Mughals were the only prominent group of Muslim merchants in 18th and early 19th century Calcutta—a group mainly connected with the traditional Asian trade in its progressively attenuated form in the context of western dominance. (N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III, p. 114)

Even if the wealth of the Mughals was much less striking than that of the Bengali landlords and gold merchants in mid-19th century Calcutta, the community still attracted the attention of the Bengalis because of its certain exotic quality and historical association. Aga Karbalai Muhammad, “the Prince of Merchants”, the leader of the Mughal community in Calcutta, held a commanding position in the city. The highly orthodox Hindu journal *Samachar Chandrika* published the following editorial after his death:

“We regret to announce the death of Aga Karbala Muhammad, the famous octogenarian merchant, last Monday. No other Muslim [in the city] was wealthier than him. He arrived in this country from his native land [Persia] with 35 lakhs of rupees and started living here, building a mansion. He used to have the life style of a Nawab Subah, maintaining all kinds of servants and maids, including many of his Mughal kinsmen who for that reason paid him deep respect. The Mughal community was entirely obedient to him. In the event of a disturbance almost all the Mughals would assemble at the place of disturbance and were bound by word to lay down their lives for him. Not free from the racial trait of quickness of temper, he observed the festival of Muharram in the true style of Islam and on that occasion spent five to seven thousand rupees on food, hospitality and illumination. Hindus, Muslims and Englishmen thronged to see the illumination of his house and the [Muharram] procession which issued from there.” (Translated from the editorial in *Samachar Chandrika*, 28 July, 1856, as printed in B. N. Bandopadhyay, *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*, 1956, p. 423.)

Ref.: 16254 O.W.

AGA MIRZA MOHOMED IBRAHIM SHERAZEE

In the name of God Merciful and Gracious

All praise be unto God who is immortal and whose creatures are mortal and mercy and peace rest on the Chief among the Prophets—and on the son of his Paternal Uncle (who is the best of “Wussees” or Guardians) and on his holy and immaculate Race and Descendants to the day of “Yuzzah” or Retribution—

After which, I the sinner before the Throne of the Bestower of bounty and the sincere dependant on the Imanums who are Guides of the true Faith—do in the possession of sound understanding and in a condition to give effect to all legal acts without force or coercion make the following “Suhee” or right declaration and lawful announcement—That whereas every living creature must of necessity taste the liquor of death, and depart out of this perishable world into the world of eternity according to the “Ayut” or sentence, “That every mortal must taste death”, therefore before that happens I do hereby appoint the high in dignity, the token of honour, the best among the Hadjees, Hadjee Zuyn-ul-aubdeen, Merchant of Sherauz, at present an Inhabitant of Calcutta and the light of my eyes my son, Akah Mohomed Alley, better known as Akah Jaun, separately and jointly as my “Wussee-ai-Shurruee” or lawful executors and my “Kyemmo-kaum” or Representatives and “Mooktears” or managers—that whenever I, the “Moosee” or Testator, depart from this transitory world to the world of Eternity, my said “Wussees” or Executors mentioned above, considering God as present, attend to every matter and to my Infant children and others—In the first place—In relation to the monies in trust of persons in Velyut [his own country] that have come to my hand formerly and latterly and lately—the best of Hadgees, the said Hadjee Zuyn-ul-aubdeen, will therewith using great diligence and exertion make Purchases pursuant to their letters—and will ship and transmit the same to the “Sahaibaun” or owners or to the “Vakeels” or agents; that the same may not be lost and that the “Mallickaun” or proprietors of the Goods, may not sustain loss—In the second place—The demands that I have against different persons, he will realize and take—The Debts that I owe to different persons according to my “Duftur” or books . . . and whatever “Usbaub” or things there are

in the "Zunnanah Khonnah" or Female apartments he will give the whole of that to the mother of my Infant children—he will not misapply anything—but he will take my wearing apparel and some shawls that are in the "Khonnah" or House and the wearing apparel of my wife and Golden articles that are in the "Tussurroof" or use of the "Wallidah" or Mother of my "utfaul" or Infant children—I have given up the whole of those to her—Further—on account of the Marriage Portion of my wife I am indebted in the sum of two hundred and fifty Rupees—adding two hundred and fifty Rupees more to that he will deliver over to my "Zoujah" or wife 500 five hundred Calcutta Sicca Rupees—of the whole of my Property consisting of my "Surmuyah" or Capital stock and my "Usbaub" or articles and things in Calcutta and my wearing apparel and my Household effects and my House and Garden that are in Sherauz and all my demands and ready money and Mercantile Goods unsold that there are, having collected together and made an account of the whole my Wussees or Executors mentioned above, deducting and reserving one third, the remaining two "Sooloos" or thirds they will divide according to "Shurrah" among my Warris or Heirs consisting of two "Zukkoor" or Males and three "Oonaus" or Females—And out of my own Sooloos or one third they will "Owullum" or in the first place give to the high in rank the best among the Hadgees my "Mukhdoom" or Master Hadgee Mahomed Bagdadee at present an Inhabitant of Calcutta the sum of 1000 one thousand Calcutta Sicca Rupees—that the said Hadgee may himself go on "Huj" or pilgrimage on my behalf—and also give the sum of 1000, one thousand Calcutta Sicca Rupees...to his "goonaub" or honour, my Mukhdoom or Master, Suyud Akah Meer Mahomed Alley Ispehannee, at present an Inhabitant of Calcutta, that he on my behalf may go to the lofty "Utbaut" or Shrine and to all the holy places and on a Pilgrimage to the Mushuddai-Mookuddes—and from my Sooloos or one third the light of my eyes my son Akah Mohomed Alley will go on to take for Prayers and Fasts for Fortyfive years at Sherauz and Ispehaun and if it be possible let my corpse be conveyed to the "Utbautae Alleat" or lofty shrine—but if that cannot be done now it is befitting that my bones be sent there hereafter—what more shall I urge—And in relation to the "Umaunut" or Deposits of the different Persons—it is expedient, that good and suitable

purchases be made therewith that he ship and transmit the same in season and that proper care be taken of the "Utfaul" or children—and as long as the Mother of the children looks after her own children and take not another husband he shew her attention—but if she goes away—she knows best—you have then connection with her—Further the accounts that exist with the "Sircar" of the pride of merchant his honour my Sahaib and "Wollee-Neamut" or benevolent lord Akah Kurbullahee Mahomed Khaun Sahiab are written in my "Duftur" or Books—which I mention for the purpose of making the same known—

Written on this 11th Eleventh day of the Month of Mohurruim-ul-Haram, one of the months of the Hijree year 1265.

[What follows is written on the margin.]

Again, as follows—The Garden of Auzooree Eahooder that I have rented out to the Sircar of the Judge Sahaib wherein he has now lived for a long time has been in my hands as a Mortgage for the sum of 46 Fortysix thousand Sicca Rupees—which said Garden I have sold to the hands of the "Hindoo" Mootee Seal for 43 Fortythree thousand Rupces. . .

Signature of Mahommed Ibrahim Sherauzee

A true Translation of the Annexed paper No. 610—in the Persian and Arabic languages and characters—Read by Moulovee Ubdool Jubbaur

Signature of attestation

Sd/- W. D. Smith 16th Dec. 1848.

Ref.: O.W. 18404

AGA KURBALAI MUHAMMAD KHAWN SAHEB

The object of writing these words directing towards a good end and safety is that the sublime in dignity, the exalted in rank, the united to prosperity and honour the glory of merchants Kurbuli Mohammed Khawn Saheb . . . in a sincere and faithful manner appear before some of the orthodox followers of the Prince of Prophets who are his confidential men and in their presence appointed the most noble and respectable Aga Mahammed Hossain Saheb Son of the Asylum of Mercy Haji Abdul Razak Chhalaby and Moonshee Koorban Ally Saheb Moôtsuddy who is

his faithful servant and Mean Sootan Saheb a dependant in the Sirkar of the Glory of Merchants, his absolute executors and the legal representatives . . . the above executors shall collect and put together the goods and effects of the testator consisting of ready money and furniture and house and possessions and household effects and outstanding dues and so forth properties; and except ready money, they shall sell the whole whatsoever there are even the fixtures on the wall, save the things belonging to each of his wives and bond maids and children . . . they shall sell by public auction and convert into ready money . . . and one third of the money to which the Testator is entitled they shall set apart and make over the rest to the heirs; and the lawful heirs of the above mentioned glory of merchants consist of his two permanent wives who are endowed with children and who are the veiled and highly respected Muzzummaut Fatima Begum Saheba, the Daughter of the Asylum of Mercy Aga Meer Hossain—may whose grave continue moist and fresh—and the veiled and highly respected Ameenutuz Zuhra, Daughter of the Asylum of Mercy Haji Abdur Razak Chhalaby and four sons [names follow] and seven Daughters [names follow] . . . and the executors above mentioned after collecting together the assets, shall in the first apply one third thereof being share of the testator to expedient and established charitable purposes according to the list under written. . . .

Whatever shall remain of the third share shall be invested in the purchase of some landed property and with the produce thereof the expenses of different religious ceremonies to be defrayed . . . ; and the Sacred Books and other miscellaneous in manuscript and print shall remain for the use of the male children; and as regards my kept mistressess consisting of female slaves etc., such as (their) children shall be allowed ten rupees per month for the expenses of their maintenance out of the shares of their children so long as they continue with them in the house . . . [children to have their full shares of the proceeds of the sale of effects, houses etc., when they come of age] Hijire year 1272.

A true translation of the Persian Will—4th August, 1856.



## APPENDIX IX

### EURASIANS AS AN ETHNIC GROUP IN CALCUTTA—SOME JUDICIAL DOCUMENTS

#### I

The last will of Sophia Yeandle, 2nd April, 1778

I give and bequeath unto my natural daughter Ann by Harry Verelest Esq.\* now in England and to her heirs, executors, administrators and assignees for ever the two several brick dwelling houses with appurtenances hereinafter mentioned and expressed, that is to say all that one house and ground situated in Calcutta in an alley fronting the great road, to the eastward of the house formerly belonging to Warren Hastings Esq. now to Mahmed Reza Khan, containing six cottahs and eight chuttacks more or less by the said Harry Verelest granted . . . for my sole use and benefit for ever and also all that one other dwelling house built and executed on the before mentioned six cottahs and eight chuttacks of ground. . . . As my said daughter Ann is as yet too young to manage the bequest it is my desire and request that the said bequests and legacies be given unto David Killican in trust for the said Ann until she shall attain the age of sixteen years. To my god-son William Rank the son of one rank (?) butcher in Calcutta I bequeath the sum of one thousand current rupees. To the Church wardens of the Portuguese Church I likewise bequeath the sum of one thousand current rupees.

#### II

Will of John Bean, 1st May 1778

I John Bean, late of Ash in the county of Kent, purser of the good ship Peacock . . . As neither the state of my finances nor my profession in life would enable or allow me to marry necessity obliged me to take a girl into keeping, according to the custom of the East—this girl is a native of Bhio and now resides in Bengal . . . [John Bean left almost everything to her and to the “Child that was born of her body . . .”].

\* Henry Verelest was Governor of Bengal during 1767-1769.

III

Will Register 1822, H.C.O.S., page 46

*Name of the testator:* Elizabeth Rebeira, alias Bebee Diana, Inhabitant of Calcutta.

*Distribution of property:* She gave to Bebee Susana her "one pair of gold Joomkah-ornament for the ears" and her "old shawl together with all her wearing apparel". Next she said, "I will that my houses and premises situated in Moonshee Tank near Chandney Choke remain in the hands of my Executors hereinafter named and the rent and income thereof collected and held in trust by them till such time the debt to which the said houses and premises are subject, be liquidated when I desire the said houses and premises be disposed of . . . and the proceeds thereof, equally divided between my adopted daughters Johanna Almeida alias Jane Thomas and Helen Lewis her daughter respectively."

She also mentioned "a piece or parcel or ground measuring about seven cottahs, be the same more or less, with godowns thereon in the front situate in Chandney Choke . . ."

Date of the will—19th February 1821.

IV

Will Register 1822, H.C.O.S., page 137

Will of Bebee Lucy

This is the last will and testament of me Bebee Lucy of Taultullah Bazaar in the town of Calcutta. I give and . . . all that my messuage tenement, brick built dwelling house situated lying and being at Taultullah Bazaar in the said town of Calcutta unto Charles Phillips his heirs and assignees for ever and I give and bequeath unto the said Charles Phillips his executors administrators or assignees all my other property of whatsoever nature kind or condition the same may be. I appoint Meer Mooksood Ally of the said town of Calcutta executor of this will. I hereby revoke all former wills by me made. In witness whereof I have hereunto put my hand and seal this fifteenth day of August in the year of Christ One thousand eight hundred and twenty-two.

The mark of Bebee Lucy

## V

Will Register 1826-30, H.C.O.S., page 121 .

I give to my daughter Mrs. Amelia Eaglestone, the wife of Mr. Eaglestone, the sum of Sicca Rupees 2000/-, to my grandson, George Alexander Eaglestone, the sum of Sicca Rupees 2000/-, to my Consamah Burkootollah now living in my service Sicca Rs. 1000/- and I give to my tenant Alla Bux Breadman... to Shaik Budderuddy of Durramtollah Street in the town of Calcutta coach-maker... my two adjoining lower roomed houses in Dingabhungah and a piece or parcel of ground thereunto belonging measuring ten cottahs... upon trust not to sell or dispose of the same... and to pay and expend the rents... towards keeping up annually my funeral rites and giving charity... to indigent people of my caste....

[Shaik Budderuddy was made sole Executor of the will.]

Date of the will—18th March 1830.

Filed on 5th May, 1830.

Bebée Nancy her mark

## VI

Will Register 1818, H.C.O.S., page 109

*Name of the testator:* Bebee Bivan, inhabitant of Calcutta.

She gave to her only son Robert James (Durie) the sum of sicca rupces 3600 and “a certain piece or parcel of ground situated in Bolee Gungee [Ballygunge] consisting of twenty-five cottahs of ground more or less.”

She directed that “after my decease the household furniture, jewels, and other property [were] to be sold and after paying [for] my funeral rites, and ceremonies according to the Mahomedan religion...”

Date of the will—15th September 1815.

## APPENDIX X

### SOME MATERIALS ON THE LOCAL HISTORY OF SUTANUTI— PAPERS MAINLY RELATING TO THE SOBHAHAZAR RAJ FAMILY

The following paper was discovered by W. K. Firminger, Editor of *Bengal, Past and Present* and reproduced in "Leaves from the Editor's Note Book" of the same journal (June 1916, pp. 253-57). He discovered this from a bundle of papers in his possession when he purchased the MS materials got together for Volume IV of Dr. Wilson's *Early Annals of the English in Bengal*. The paper, he observes, contains some information of value and is well worth preservation and future comment. The paper is reproduced here in an abridged form.

#### MEMORANDUM

Sutanuti, Govindpore and Calcutta were three ancient villages which constitute the present City of Calcutta.

In 1698 Mr. Walsh, one of the servants of the Company trading to the East Indies, was sent to the Camp of Prince Azim-us sham, grandson of Aurengzeb (then appointed Governor of the Provinces of Bengal, Behar and Orissa) to procure from his Highness a grant of the villages of Sutanuti, Govindpore and Calcutta. The Letters Patent of the Prince gave permission to the Company to purchase from the Zamindars, the said villages with the reservation to himself of an annual revenue of Rs. 1195-0-0 which the ground used to pay to the Nabobs of Bengal. These villages, which in virtue of the Prince's Letters Patent or *Nishan* had been purchased from the Zamindars thereof, extended about three miles on the eastern side of the river and about one mile inland.

In 1717 A.D. the English, through the influence of Dr. Hamilton, who had given the well-known medical aid to the Emperor Ferrokhsere, obtained from his Majesty a Farman or Imperial mandate confirming all former lands to the Company in which among other things it is stated that the rentings of Sutanuti, Govindpore and Calcutta in the Parguna of Amerabad, etc., in Bengal were formerly granted them and bought by consent of the Zamindars from them and are now in the Company's posses-

sion for which they yearly pay them a sum of Rupees 1195-6 ans.

In 1758 the East India Company received from the Subah or Governor of Bengal the free tenure of the lands included in Parguna Calcutta; in the enumeration of these lands is mentioned Sutanuti yielding a rent of Rs. 1506-0-15-3.

On the 12th August 1765 Shah Alam granted the Dewani to the Company and confirmed their Zamindari rights.

From 1758 to 1772 the Company continued to derive revenue from the said villages by letting them out to Farmers.

The East India Company as original Talukdars of the said villages enjoyed the following rights and privileges.

The land therein of which they had *Khas* possession they dealt with them as absolute owners and if they allowed tenants to occupy them these tenants were tenants at will.

The bulk of the holdings, however, were in the possession or permanent occupation of tenants from whom they (the Company) could buy only rents fixed in perpetuity. These may be called properly Talukdari lands. The *Khamar* or common or waste lands were also the absolute property of the Company and were sold, granted or let to applicants for building purposes. The *Escheat* lands were also of this description. There were also *Lakheraj* or rent-free lands. The Company by granting *Mourasi Pattas* which brought to them certain emoluments converted *Khas* and *Khamar* lands into Talukdari lands, and in the case of these last class of lands fresh *Pattas* were issued whenever there was change of proprietorship.

In order to prevent encroachments on waste lands and persons holding more lands than they paid rents for, a rule was made that all lands should be remeasured and fresh *Pattas* taken out every ten years. In cases of waste lands the occupant was required to pay the value of the excess (*Khamar Beshi*) before his possession was recognised and a *Patta* granted for it.

In 1774-75 or 1181-1182 B.S. Sutanuti was measured for the last time on behalf of the Government and *Chittas* and *Jamabandies* were prepared. According to the *Jamabandi* the Company continued to levy the rents of Sutanuti up to the time they remained Talukdars thereof. Attached to the Taluk of Sutanuti were two minor villages of Bagbazar and Hogulcurrea which came to the possession of the Government in the same way as Sutanuti.

Maharaja Navakrishna Bahadur after having been appointed Agent to the Council in political transactions with the Country Powers, was for the many valuable and essential services he had rendered to Government, rewarded among other things with the grant of a certain Zamindary called Nawpara, which he took possession of, under the authority of Muhammad Riza Khan sanctioned by the *Khalsa*, but in 1777 its former proprietor Abdool Wahid resumed possession of it under a Decree of Court.

The Government therefore in lieu of the said Zamindary of Nawpara granted to the Maharaja by a Persian *Sanud* dated 16th January 1778 corresponding with the 6th of Magh 1184, the Talukdari of the several villages of Sutanuti, Bagbazar and Hogulcurrea with the reservation of an annual revenue of Rs. 1237-13-10.

On the 1st June 1778 the Maharaja applied to Warren Hastings for an English Lease of the Taluk, and Warren Hastings, the then Governor-General of India, and R. Barwell, Philip Francis, and Edward Wheeler, members of Council of the Presidency at Fort William in Bengal, by a certain Deed of Indenture dated the 28th April 1778 devised, gave and granted the Talukdari of Sutanuti, Bagbazar and Hogulcurrea to the Maharaja, his heirs, executors administrators and assignees for ever subject to the yearly payment of the said sum of Rs. 1237-13-10 to the Bengal Government. By this grant the Governor made over to the Maharaja all the Talukdari rights and privileges relating to the said villages which appertained to the East India Company as such Talukdar thereof. The grant mentions that it conveyed to him all the produce, issues and profits of the said Talukdari, all rents, tolls, taxes, commons, Khamar lands, waste lands, lands forfeited or to be forfeited, Patta Salamies, perquisites, benefits and advantages whatsoever arising from the said Talukdary; the Government also thereby authorized him to enforce the payment of the rents thereof by all such ways and means as would or could in the like case have been lawfully exercised by or on the part of the said East India Company.

Along with the grant the Maharaja received copies of the said measurement and assessment papers in 1774-75 the originals of which are still forthcoming in the Calcutta Collectorate.\*

\* A search made by me for these papers proved futile, whatever the reasons.

The Maharaja entered into possession of his right according to the said Persian Sanud.

Subsequently some of the influential tenants of Sutanuti, piqued at the good fortune of the Maharaja, prayed Government to be allowed to pay their quota of rents to some servants of the Government and not to the Maharaja, but the Government informed them that it was the will of Government that the dues of the Company which have been transferred to the Maharaja, shall be paid into his hands as the immediate proprietor, instead of being paid as heretofore into the hands of an Agent of the Company, and to this their obedience was required. A second petition of the said tenants met the same fate.

From 1778 to 1790 the Collector of Calcutta assisted the Maharaja in collecting the Jamma of the Taluk, the former reserving the Chowkidari tax and remitting the *Maal Mulherrija* and *Kutwali* to the Maharaja.

The Maharaja continued to enjoy the Talukdari right up to the time of his death which happened on the 22nd November 1793. Besides the old rents of the Taluk the Maharaja received Salamies by the grant of 617 Pattas to diverse tenants.

Soon after his death disputes between Raja Gopeemohan, the adopted son, and Raja Rajkrishna, the son of the body of the Maharaja, commenced several proceedings in the Supreme Court: the disputes ended in an equal partition of his Estate by order of the Supreme Court.

In the Bengali year 1214 or 1807 A.D. a final settlement and an equal partition of the said Taluk, Sutanuti, etc. took place between the said Raja Gopeemohan and Raja Rajkrishna and two lists of allotment in shares of the Taluk were prepared and executed dividing the same into two Lots marked respectively No. 1 and No. 2. Raja Rajkrishna made choice of Lot No. 1 and Raja Gopeemohan of Lot No. 2.

Although the said Deeds gave the Talukdars full power to enforce the payment of their dues by the tenants, yet great difficulty has been experienced by them, specially of late years, in realising the same from refractory tenants, on account of the various salutary laws which have been passed by Government from time to time for helping the mofussil Zamindars not applying to a Taluk within the jurisdiction of Calcutta. Various efforts had been made by both branches of Maharaja Newakissen's

[Navakrishna's] family to move the Government to rectify the anomalous state of things, whereby the Talukdars were obliged to pay the Government Revenue punctually, but were left without proper provision for the levy of rents from their tenants, and in 1859 at the instance of the then Lieut.-Governor of Bengal and on the motion of Mr. Sconce the Legislative Council ordered the draft Bill prepared by the lawyers of the Talukdars to be printed. The departure of Mr. Sconce to England which soon followed and the retirement for good of Raja Radhakanta stopped all progress of the Bill.

The Raja Rajkrishna having obtained a moiety of the Taluk exercised during his lifetime the rights of a Talukdar and enjoyed its income. He issued 78 Pattas. After his death his Estate came into the hands of the Receiver, and from that time there has been a considerable diminution from the income from the Taluk it being now scarcely sufficient to pay the Government Revenue which after remission on account of lands taken up for public purposes is now Rs. . . . The heirs and representatives of Raja Rajkrishna up to a certain time issued 141 Pattas.

It appears that in 1264 B.S. [1857 A.D.] there was realised from Raja Rajkrishna's moiety Rs. 372, in 1265 [1858] Rs. 330 and in 1266 Rs. 200. . . . The collections from Raja Gopecmohan's moiety though larger exhibited considerable falling off year by year.

## II

Supreme Court in Equity, 1835

Henry Shakespear and others

Vs.

Gopecmohan Deb

To H. Shakespear, I. W. Hogg & I. H. Chippendale Esqr.

Gentlemen

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your clerk's letter of the 21st instant enclosing me a copy of the Resolution passed by you regarding my property at Neemtollah in my Talook Sootanooty and beg in reply to submit my objections thereto, that it would affect my Talookdary Right if I agree with any narrow limit or boundary of the land in question which being subject to gradual encroachment and eroding by the river I can



hardly comply with the Resolution unless I am allowed to possess all the Khamar or alluvial lands which are now or will be hereafter agreeably to the Talookdary Grant.

In further objection I beg leave to state that in the cold season the high water will go back at a great distance from the present high water mark, leaving a large quantity of land on my Talook, and that Hutcollah and Coomartooly in my Talook Sootanooty have suffered a great disruption in the river's course and they are still in the same state and that if I do not obtain the land which has been or is to be added to my Talook by the gradual recess of the river my Talook will of course be subject to ruin and I to a heavy loss. It is therefore customary in every country that the sands encroached on and left by the river are the loss and profit of the zamindars and not of the Public.

In further objection to the proposed resolution I implore permission to represent that the ground to the westward of the line marked by Mr. Blachynden has been with other lands in the peaceful possession of my father and myself for a period of nearly 40 years during which time my under-tenants have been peaceably and quietly landing their articles, and building, repairing and breaking up boats on the premises close to the water without stopping the navigation of any boats whatsoever which I can prove by several credible witnesses and that if my tenants are compelled to remove their boats &c. from the ground in question they will meet with great difficulty in consequence to carry on their business of that description thereby resulting in a considerable loss to the source of Revenue to Government.

Having stated my objections to the proposed measures I beg leave to represent that should you think proper to enforce the Resolution of the 21st inst. you may be pleased to give me a previous notice of the same, that I may prepare to try the question on the Supreme Court to preserve my hereditary right.

I remain with due respect  
Gentlemen  
Your most obedt. & humble servant  
Gopeemohun Deb

May 1821

### III

#### Some Pattas or Title-deeds granted by the Sobhabazar Deb Family

(a)

Shree Shree Hari  
(Persian Seal)

To Sreejoot Ramhurry Takoor

This is an auspicious deed of Pottah for lands to the following purport. I do hereby grant unto you a Pottah for (5.12) five cottahs and twelve chatacks of exchanged ground in the Mehal of Brindavan Bysack situated in my Talook Mouza Sootanooty for the purpose of your dwelling and by paying the annual rent of sicca (13-16) Thirteen annas and sixteen gundahs you may happily reside at and occupy the same. Under this condition I grant this Pottah. Dated the 26th Shrabun in the Bengal year 1190 corresponding with the 8th August of English year 1783.

For Pottah Salamy	..	...	1 - 4 - 0
„ Fees „	..	...	5 - 0 - 0
			6 - 4 - 0

[It may be noted that Ramhurry Takoor was a Brahmin. Was he exempted from paying the price of land for that reason?]

(b)

Shree Shree Hari  
(Persian Seal)

To Krishnachunder Roy greeting with benediction

This is an auspicious deed of Pottah for grounds to the following purport. I do hereby grant unto you a Pottah for fourteen cottahs of Ground in the Mehal of Aumeerchinder Baboo and for four chatacks of jubd besi ground (or ground in excess of measurement) making in all fourteen cottahs and four chatacks situate in my Talook Mouza Sootanooty for your dwelling and by paying the annual rent of Sicca (2-2-4) Two rupees two annas and four gundahs you may happily reside at and occupy same. Under the condition I grant this Pottah. Dated the 13th Choiter of the

Bengal year 1200 corresponding with the 23rd March of the English year 1794.

Value	Rs. 4291	
Punchutherah	... ..	214 - 8 - 15
Pottah Salamy	... ..	6 - 4 - 0
Value of 4 chatacks of jubd besi ground		76 - 10 - 0
		297 - 6 - 15

(c)

Shree Shree Doorga Sharanam  
(Persian Seal)

To Doorgachuran Mitter

This is an auspicious deed of Pottah for lands to the following purport. I do hereby grant unto you a Pottah for (4¼) four and three quarter cottahs of Khamar lands of the broken Posta or Embankment situated on the north of the pucka or brick built Ghaut of Nimtollah and lying within my Talook Mouza Soota-nooty, for the purpose of your dwelling and by paying me the annual rent of Sicca (11-8) eleven annas and eight gundahs you may happily dwell upon and occupy the same. Under this condition I grant unto you this Pottah. Dated the 17th Cartick in the Bengal year 1186/1779.

#### IV

Hustbook Income or Estimation of rents &c. of Khamar land of Nimtollah from 1210 to 1241 of Bengal year 30th Sraban [1803-1834].

There are eight (8) heads in the table: viz. (1) Golah or store place of timber per annum, (2) Golah or store place for durma or mat per annum, (3) Golah or store place of *bechly* or straw per annum, (4) House holders per annum, (5) Ijarah for Ghaut per annum, (6) Breaking boat and sloops and for landing goods per annum, (7) Arutdaree Mehal per annum, (8) Dhoba or washerman Mehal per annum.

<i>Bengal Year</i>	<i>Total amount per annum</i>		
	Rs.	as.	gs.
1210 B S.	549	6	10
1211 „	624	6	10
1212 „	862	12	2½
1213 „	836	12	2½
1214 „	922	15	10
1215 „	1051	2	15
1216 „	1136	10	0
1217 „	1190	10	0
1218 „	1369	0	0
1219 „	1430	7	0
1220 „	1606	11	0
1221 „	1602	11	0
1222 „	1913	11	0
1223 „	1913	11	0
1224 „	2032	1	0
1225 „	1987	1	0
1226 „	1735	1	0
1227 „	1825	1	0
1228 „	1860	1	0
1229 „	1963	1	0
1230 „	2302	13	0
1231 „	1814	13	0
1232 „	2304	0	0
1233 „	2781	0	0
1234 „	3352	0	0
1235 „	3255	0	0
1236 „	3532	0	0
1237 „	3459	0	0
1238 „	3453	0	0
1239 „	3452	0	0
1240 „	3139	0	0
1241 „	3001	0	0

## APPENDIX XI

### THE HINDU JOINT FAMILY AS A HOUSE OF CARDS — NEMAICHARAN MALLIK'S WILL CASE

The following extract from the *Memoirs of William Hickey*, (edited by Alfred Spencer, vol. IV, London, 1925, pp. 348-49) and the copies of Nemaicharan's wills reproduced here show Nemaicharan's deep concern about the family unity and his ideological conviction that his two eldest sons could maintain that unity. The extract from the *Memoirs* follows.

#### I

[Nemaicharan Mallik]

This man had acquired an extraordinary efficiency in our laws, so much so that he had for many years been the adviser of all those who had anything to do with courts of Justice and was competent to tell them whether they had sufficient merits in their cases to justify the commencement of or the defence of a suit. He was also perfectly conversant with the distinction between an equitable and a legal title, and was in the practice of sitting every evening in his own house for a certain number of hours to hear the statements of the various persons that attended for the purpose of consulting him, for which, by the by, it was said and I have no doubt truly, that he made those suitors whose causes he espoused and patronised, amply repay him for his trouble and his time by exacting a very high percentage upon whatever the amount recovered or saved might be. Yet this shrewd and uncommonly clever fellow, notwithstanding he knew so much of Law for others, fell into the very error it had been the principal object of the last dozen years of his life to avoid, and using every precaution in his power to guard against by so arranging as to make it impossible for his sons to enter into any litigation or dissension with each other after his death. With this in view he drew out three different papers in the nature of wills, the second and third being altogether explanatory of the first. His last illness was a long one, and he went off very gradually. During the progress of the disease he over and over again sum-

moned all his sons, being eight in number, the youngest of whom was upwards of eighteen years of age, into his presence, when he equally exerted his persuasive powers and his parental authority in endeavouring to make them promise that they would continue friends when he was no more; but above all that they would abide by the settlement and provision he had made for them respectively. He further pressed that the six juniors would consent to the management of the estate after the fortunes of the six were paid. Thus the six juniors without hesitation and in the most peremptory terms refused to accede to, telling their dying father that they considered themselves most unjustly dealt by, in as much as so unequal a proportion of the estate was given to their two elder brothers. The death of Nemychurn Mullick being expected every month, the Advocate-General recommended that a Bill in Equity might be prepared against the old man's two eldest sons praying on behalf of the six youngest children an equal distribution of the estate with their two elder brothers. The suit continued during the remainder of my residence in Calcutta. It would in itself have proved a little fortune to me could I have waited for its conclusion. As it was it yielded a very considerable profit.

## II

### Supreme Court Records and Annual Register, 1807

To Ram Gopal Mullick, my eldest son, and Ramtanu Mullick, my middle son . . . with benedictions.

### Sri Sri Ramji

After my decease these eight persons [names of sons] shall receive each 3,00,000 three lakhs of rupees. The money which you two have taken [two sons as excecutors] for to trade with, and what you will take you will return to the estate with interest and the money which those six have taken for to trade with and what they will take they will return to the estate with interest. The gold and silver ornaments and plates, and ornaments set with precious stones, and clothes and apparel which I have given to the eight sons respectively and which I have given to their wives, sons and daughters and what I shall give, have no concern

with the estate and will belong to those eight persons respectively. Besides this, whatever estate shall remain, consisting of houses, ground, talooks, cash, Co's paper, bonds of individuals, apparels, gold and silver plates, effects and jewels, will remain under the charge of you two, you two are the managers thereof ... and from the estate perform my obsequies and those of my wife & constantly perform religious acts in a suitable manner. ... The 24th Magh 1213.

Sd/Sri Nemaye Charan Mullick

### B

It is my desire to perform some work at Sri Sri Briudaban and Sri Sri Juggernaut and to make a ghaut on the bank of the Ganges and to cause Srimat Bhaugbot, the Sri Mahabharat, the Valmichee Puran and Choitanya Mungal to be chanted. . . The cash which stands in my accounts for the worship of Sri Sri Juggernaut Deb Jec at Mahes and for the worship of Sri Sri Radhabullab Jee at Bullabpore, and for the worship of Sri Sri Crishna Royjee at Canchrapara in the names of these deities respectively, will remain under the charge of you two, and you will after my death defray the expenses of the monthly worship of the deities from the interest thereof. . . The money given by mother for the purpose of making a bower at Sri Sri Brmdaban stands in my account. . . it is my wish to make a temple for the Sri Sri Mchaprabhu Jee at Ombica. . .

[Will disputed but established after tedious proceedings till 1817]

### III

In the month of Kartik 1214, Baboo Nemaee Churn Mullick departed this life, and within three days, the six brothers filed a Bill in the Supreme Court against the other two. An answer was then filed, witnesses were examined, and it was decreed that the will and codicil made by Nemaee Churn Mullick was in conformity with the Shasters and was to be deemed; that the three lakhs of rupees left to each of his sons should be paid them, and that all the religious performances he had ordained should be completed by his two sons.

That which might be left after these actions had been performed was to be the property equally of the eight sons, but was

to remain under the charge of the two.

When this allotment had been made (by the court) the master was ordered to send in his report without delay. But when in accordance with the wishes of Nemaee Churn Mullick, his two sons had expended more than seven lakhs of rupees in the first Shraddha, and offering the funeral cake, the six brothers objected to the sum saying that seventy thousand rupees would have sufficed. When the witnesses of each party had been examined the Master made his report in favour of the six brothers. The two executors filed their exceptions, which were heard in the court, the report was rejected, and it was ordered, that if proof could be given of the sums actually expended in the Shraddha, they should be allowed. Though these sums were proved by the men who had made the payments, yet the Master, by cutting and clipping the account, reduced it to 2,05,100 rupees which was the sum he reported to have been laid out in the Shraddha. To this both parties made exceptions which were heard in the Court but the report was confirmed. Dissatisfied with the result, both parties appealed to England. But as the documents and papers of the two executors had by some accident failed to reach England, the appeal was heard *ex parte*, and the judges considering the sum excessive, ordered the Master again to examine the matter. The six Baboos, upon this, have now given a statement to the Master, with the view of reducing the amount said to have been expended in the Shraddha, and other religious duties. In September last in consequence of the petition of the six brothers, an order was passed that the two brothers should pay into Court all the money in their hands belonging to the estate of Nemaee Churn Mullick together with the funds appropriated to religious duties. The two brothers petitioned that the 2,05,100 rupees destined for their mother's shraddha, might remain with them instead of being paid into Court as she was then very old and very ill in health. The Court, however, ordered that it should be [paid in, but] kept separate and paid out when necessary. But when the mother was dead, and the two executors had petitioned for the money the Master began a reference and examining the last proceedings and taking the evidence of Pundits and some rich men, made a report two or three days before the Shraddha, that only one lakh of rupees should be allowed for this ceremony.



Let the reader then judge, this suit of the Mullicks' has been between twenty-two and twenty-three years in the Court, and is not yet settled, the expenses incurred by both parties cannot have been much less than eighteen or nineteen lakhs of rupees. What advantage is there in this? These men are wealthy and have therefore been enabled to contest the matter to this day, which others could not have done.

From: *John Bull*, June 22, 1830

#### IV

The patrilineal ideology underlying the Hindu family organisation, however, continued to persist. As a sentiment in literature and as a reality in legal documents it emerged with curious persistence. The following excerpts are from the will of Raja Kashinath Ghosal, belonging to one of the foremost families of Calcutta and its immediate suburbs. In his will Kashinath describes himself as the eldest of seven brothers. After mentioning some down-to-earth details about his "self-acquired wealth", etc. Kashinath observes, "Faith is living and [it] will maintain my family."

"In the present age youth of tender years upon attaining their majority and running into various extravagances waste their patrimonies...and becoming ultimately involved in debts obliterate the honour and good reputation of their ancestors, like Neelmony Halidar..."

"It will on no account be proper that these my two sons [entrusted to the care of his brothers, the executors of the will] be married before they respectively attain the age of sixteen years..."

"If peradventure my sons die married and sonless, or unmarried, then their wives, daughters and daughters' sons shall not on any account get the above mentioned established wealth, as many of them as there shall be, shall each receive for food and clothing at the rate of 20 twenty rupees per month. The said principal wealth that shall be forthcoming at the time in Company's Paper the whole of it shall be divided between my six younger brothers and their sons in equal shares and they [meaning his sons' wives and their daughters] will not get the same."

[Will of Kashinath Ghosal, the year 1828, Ref. O.W. 11064]

## APPENDIX XII

### AN IMPERIAL FIRMAN FOR A CALCUTTA BANKER FAMILY

Mahammud Tawazzan Shah Mirza Khuram Bakht Bahadur (may his prosperity last for ever, O God!)

In accordance with an august order passed on Sunday the twenty seventh of Jamadiyussani in the fortieth year of His Majesty's reign... His Highness the protector of people, of holy titles, illustrious and powerful prince, best plant in the garden of royalty, choice fruit of the tree of sovereignty, fruitful plant of the orchard of pomp and grandeur, verdant flower of the garden of everlasting fortune, shining star of the heaven of greatness and glory, precious pearl of the sea of fortune and prosperity, first foremost hair on the forehead of religion and fortune, lustre of eyes of country and religion... included in the favours of Solomon like powerful Emperor... lamp of the magnificent royal house, alighting place of the favours of God, rising place of the light of the imperial clemency... His Majesty's truly august son, planter of the flags of victory and conquest, opener of the doors of equity and justice, helper of the various fields of victory, assistant of the crusaders of the world of sovereignty, shining moon of the sky of grandeur, chosen one among the princes of high dignity... It is again submitted for His Majesty's perusal and is written by Hafiz Abdul Ghani the writer of events and least of the houseborn slaves in his Majesty's Court that an order has been issued to the effect that Raja Sooknoy be promoted to the title of Maharaja Bahadur and the post of Char Hazaree [command over four thousand men] and be permitted to use a Palkee with fringes around it and that his son Ram Chandra be promoted to the title of Raja and the post of Do Hazaree [command over two thousand men]... Endorsed by His Highness the Prince of the World and its inhabitants...

Seal of Khuram Bakht Muazam  
Shah Bahadur in the year 35 of His  
Majesty's reign, son of Jehandar  
Shah Bahadur heir apparent of  
Emperor Shah Alam Guzi, in the  
year 1207 Hijri.

## APPENDIX XIII

### DWARAKANATH TAGORE'S POLITICAL VIEWS—AN INTERPRETATION OF COLLABORATION

A meeting of the inhabitants, convened by the Sheriff, took place on Saturday evening the 18th June [1836], at the Town Hall, for the purpose of petitioning Parliament against Act XI of the Legislative Council, . . . whereby the British subjects are deprived of their right of appealing to English Courts of Law, against the decision of the provincial tribunals.

SPEECH BY DWARAKANATH TAGORE DELIVERED AT THE TOWN HALL.  
ON THE 18TH JUNE, 1836

"I have much pleasure in rising to second this resolution, and I do hope that my doing so may be the humble means of removing an impression that the natives of this country are indifferent to the subject of this discussion. Here we see assembled a set of intelligent gentlemen, among whom I perceive a number of natives, who I may say are not ignorant now though they were so under the rule of the Mofussil Courts. If we are not so ignorant as our brethren in the Mofussil—and who will say that we are not better informed than they are?—to whom are we indebted for it?—To Englishmen. Twenty years ago, the Company treated us as slaves! Who first raised us from this state but the merchants of Calcutta; and the first among them was the late much lamented Mr. John Palmer? All that time the government servants never took any interest to improve the condition of the natives; though there might have been a few honourable exceptions. It was to those who were called interlopers, it was to the merchants and agents, and other independent English settlers, that the natives of Calcutta were indebted for the superiority they possess over their countrymen of the Mofussil; and to the lawyers, who are ever ready to defend the rights threatened to be infringed, they are also under particular obligation. We are told, the government wish to equalize Englishmen with the natives. But what equalization do they put into practice? The natives have hitherto been slaves; are the Englishmen therefore to be made slaves also? This is the kind of equality the government are seeking to

establish. They have taken all which the natives possessed; their lives, liberty, property, and all were held at the mercy of government, and now they wish to bring the English inhabitants of the country to the same state; they will not raise the natives to the condition of the Europeans, but they lower the Europeans to the state of the natives. If you (addressing himself to the Englishmen present)—if you do not come forward to defend your rights at this juncture, you will repent when it is too late; you will suffer what we have suffered for these last sixty years. Little is to be expected from our countrymen. They are timid in the extreme, and very reluctant to come forward in asserting their rights. They fear that those who rule them will be displeased, and would run them by a stroke of the pen; but the fear is not without cause, for numbers of them have suffered for no other crime than displeasing a civil servant, or unintentionally omitting to make a Salam when they were passing on the road. This is the character of the generality of them,—the few exceptions are confined to those who, like myself, have been spoilt by the 'interlopers'. The majority of my countrymen say,—'if I have lost one eye, let me take care of the other'. And thus they keep themselves back from public meetings, and are tardy in the assertion of their rights. Do not be surprised that there are so few natives present on an important occasion like the present; their absence is not unaccountable, for they do not understand the merits of the question we are considering. But a time will come when the case will be quite different. Let the Hindoo College go on as it has gone on for three or four years more, and you will have a meeting like this attended by four times your number of natives. I have frequently been engaged in the management of suits in the Mofussil Courts, having property of my own, or relatives of mine, in almost every district of Bengal, and well know the system adopted there, I have also some experience in the Supreme Court, and am therefore qualified to speak upon the merit of both. The costs of the Supreme Court I allow are heavy; but heavy as they are, they are incurred openly, and with proper authority: so that when a case is decided, the winning party gets back all the costs he has incurred. The case in regard to the Mofussil Courts is very different. There the suit costs—the bribes of the corrupt Omlahs amount to,—twenty times the authorized costs, and there, too,

the costs when once given are gone for ever. The fault, however, is not in the persons who preside over those courts; it is in the system, which needs reform. To this the Law Commission should direct their attention. Why does not Mr. Macaulay correct the abuses of the present system? Can anyone find fault with the justice of the Supreme Court? If its expenses are high, they should be lowered. The first and principal judges of the Mofussil Courts are the Omlahs, who lead the inexperienced judges as they please. There is scarcely any law for the realizing of money decreed by the Mofussil Courts. The Collector, perhaps the brother of the judge, is the person to realize the money: but this functionary has more to do than he can well get through in the way of his immediate duties in the collection of the revenue, in attending to the resumption cases, and several other duties which fully occupy his time, and you may go on presenting petitions all your life, but get no money out of the treasury. In the Mofussil Courts, a distraint of property for rent occupies a couple of years. There are no common law or ejectments in the Mofussil; every case must be heard like a regular equity suit. In the meantime, should you let the government revenue fall into arrears, your estate is sold by the tax-gatherer, without any mercy or consideration. There is no doubt that the Court of Directors are desirous of exercising absolute and despotic power in the country: I would call to your attention the case of Mr. Smith, one of the most upright judges the civil service ever had. He, it is well known, refused to accept Company's paper as security in a certain cause, because he conscientiously doubted whether it could afford sufficient and certain guarantee. For this he was threatened with suspension. Even in the times of the Mahommedans, a cazi could not be removed for far greater supposed transgressions; without conviction, he could not be condemned. Such is the system pursued under this government; yet there are some who uphold it. I will let them enjoy those precious blessings, and thank God that my person is in Calcutta, within the Mahratta Ditch, where my life is secure. I have property in the Mofussil, which the judges there, if they choose, may take away; but my person they cannot injure."

## APPENDIX XIV

### OBSEQUIES AND MARRIAGES IN OLD CALCUTTA

It is significant that even *Samachar Darpan*, a newspaper managed by Christian missionaries of Serampore, devoted considerable space to news of Hindu ceremonies, obviously to make the newspaper popular. The comments were rarely critical. The elaborate marriages and the more elaborate obsequies are vividly documented in *Samachar Darpan* and contemporary newspapers. (B. N. Bandopadhyay's *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha* in two volumes contains excerpts from *Samachar Darpan* and its contemporaries.)

The following extracts, however, have been selected mainly to illustrate the nature and extent of the celebration of obsequies in old Calcutta. While newspaper evidence on early 19th century celebrations of obsequies is profuse, there are few descriptions of such events in the later period. Apart from the development of new preoccupations, the attitudes towards the phenomena of death, hell and the role of a son were possibly undergoing subtle changes.

The last item in the series deals with the festival of worship.

#### I

(Quotation from the *Dattaca Mimansa*)

In *omitting to adopt a son*, an *offence* is incurred, for the precept enjoining the production of a son being *positive* it results that the contravention of it is the cause of an *offence*, and on default of any son in general exclusion from heaven is declared in the text. "Heaven awaits not one destitute of a son", &c. And further, in the following passage also, a son in general is shown to be the cause of redemption from debt. "A *Brahmana* immediately on being born is produced a debtor in *three* obligations: to the holy saints for the practice of religious duties; to the *gods* for the performance of sacrifice; to his forefathers for offspring—or he is absolved from debt, who has a son, has performed sacrifices and practises religious duties." Manu also [says]: "a son of any description must be anxiously adopted by one who has none", for

the sake of the funeral cake, water and solemn rites; and for the celebrity of his name.

From: Sir F. W. Macnaghten, *Considerations on the Hindu Law* 1824, p. 135

## II

[A vivid description of the *sradh* ceremony of Raja Nabakrishna's mother occurs in the pages of a 19th century journal, quoted in Nabakrishna's biography by N. N. Ghose. The description is based on current traditions about the event, and, even if it is exaggerated, its overall significance is confirmed by circumstantial evidence.]

There were full thirty days between the death and the *sradh* day and Nubkissen's countrymen made good this advantage. At first the beggars, Bhats, and Pariahs undertook the journey. Next there were those whose condition oscillated between decency and beggary. Lastly, men even in competent circumstances, tempted by large expectations and urged by greedy wives, complied with the small chance of being distinguished in the crowd, followed. . . . As presents were given per head the very babies were brought and when many of them died of suffocation, the parents preserved them for the occasion and exhibit[ing] them as if they were alive, added to their incomes. . . .

All the pundits of Bengal and many even of Benares were invited and came. Nubkissen with all his wealth could ill afford accommodation for the host. But in all cases where he failed, the Hindoo inhabitants of the city and the surrounding villages opened their hospitable doors. The beggars slept in the fields, under trees and on the roadside. The dietic resources and the confectionary skill of the whole country were invoked to feed the motley mass of humanity. . . . A nation besieging Nubkissen was too much for him. Some who had travelled a fortnight or twenty days received nothing at all. But the *amlahs* [Nabakrishna's family officials] literally made fortunes. . . . Popular estimation reckons that sum [the sum spent at the *sradh*] at nine lacs of rupees.

## III

[In a Supreme Court document of the early 19th century, the following deposition occurs: it seeks to give an idea of the expenditure at the *sradh* of Nemaicharan Mallick.]

I am about 60 or 61 years of age. I was 15 years of age when I came to Calcutta. I knew Nimychurn Mullick. . . . I made the *dan* [offering or gift]: by guess I distributed about 14 or 15 thousand rupees. Danotsarga [gifts] consisted of gold, silver, woollen clothes, palanquins, horses . . . Kangalis [beggars] numbered about 2 lakhs, coming mainly from outside Calcutta and filled houses from Jaunbazar to Baghbazar. Kangalis got Re. 1 each, . . . got Rs. 2 each. Beggars were let into empty Thakurbaris [houses for family deities] of the houses. . . . I knew Raja Nubkissen I was at his mother's *sradh*. There were great numbers of Kangalis. . . . I remember three famous *sradhs* in Bengal—Raja Nubkissen's mother's, Gangagobinda Singh's mother's, Nimychurn Mullick's *Sradh*. . . . A man performs according to the property he possesses. . . . Upon the performance of Gangagobinda's mother's *sradh* some say 18 lakhs, some say 20 lakhs were spent. People came from 12 to 15 days journey. I do not know [of] the expenses of the *sradh* of Nubkissen's mother—some say 4 lakhs, some 5 lakhs.

## IV

A Grand *Shrad* at Calcutta—We learn that last Monday night the lanes and gullies meeting Chitpore Road in the vicinity of Jorasanko were thronged with Kangalis in consequence of a grand *shrad* performed in the morning by Baboo Pran Krishto Mullick in honour of his mother, when the Baboo presented to the Brahmans a large elephant, a beautiful horse, a nice-looking Palkee in addition to several gold and silver articles and valuable Cashmere shawls.

*The Englishman*, December 2, 1846

## V

The *shraddu* [*sradh*] celebrated by Baboo Asootosh Deb, in consequence of the death of his mother, is described by all those who witnessed it as having been conducted on a scale of unusual liberality. As many of our readers have only an indistinct idea of



the transactions on such an occasion, we have gleaned from the various Native papers the following particulars, which will not, we hope, be found totally devoid of interest.

We would premise, that the wealthy family of which Asootosh Deb is now the head, is of modern growth. His father, the well-known Ram Doolol Deb [De], the banian of the house of Fergusson and Co. in its palmy days, who is said to have left nearly a million sterling, was originally a sirkar in the family of the Dutt's, upon five rupees a month; and it is currently reported, that to the very last, he proceeded monthly to their residence, even after he had become a millionaire, to receive his usual salary, that he might offer a token of humility and gratitude to those who had befriended him when he was poor and unknown.

The *Chundrika* says that the *shraddu* was conducted with such unparalleled magnificence as to beggar all description. There were no less than four *dawn sagurs*, or ocean of gifts, in which is comprised the bestowal of land, and a variety of silver salvers, water pots, vases, receptacles for pan [betel leaf], and other utensils. These were given to the most renowned Pundits who had been invited. The four oceans of gifts are calculated to have cost 40,000 rupees. Besides this, there were two sets of offerings, in which every article of silver included in the "ocean", was represented in gold. What became of these more precious gifts, we have not been able to discover. Brahmuns [Brahmins] are not allowed, under heavy denunciations, to receive them. It is said that they are sent on some occasions to the shrine at Kalee Ghat; and at others, are received either by the family priest, or by some of the Brahmuns in secret whose love of gold exceeds their fear of the curses in their own holy books. There were also given away elephants, horses, palanquin carriages, and other articles of a similar description.

Regarding the invitations and fees given to Brahmuns, we find that there were five hundred invitations of the first class sent to learned Brahmuns, whose names had been spontaneously selected by Asootosh Deb himself. Each of the Brahmuns included in this number received a gift in money, varying from 125 to 30 rupees; and a present of food, brass water-pots, and other articles varying in value from 16 to 10 rupees. The second class of invitation, made at the recommendation of friends, comprised twelve hundred priests, and their dismissal fee varied from 17 to 6

rupees. The third class consisting of those who received a kind of half invitation, — the letter being only half the length of those sent to the first and second classes, — embraced sixteen hundred Brahmuns, who obtained each from 4 to 2 rupees. The fourth class comprised those who had simply received tickets of admission; that is to say, it consisted of every man with a sacerdotal thread who presented himself. The number of these was very great, not fewer than twelve thousand; and the sum distributed among them, varied from 2 rupees to eight annas. Thus we have more than fifteen thousand Brahmuns assembled on this occasion, to partake of the liberality of the Baboo. Of these, four thousand are reported to have sat down to a feast at the house.

For three or four days, says the *Prabhakur*, the poor continued to pour into the town from every venue, like so many files of ants, and were thrust into the houses of nearly seventy of the friends of the family. Among these, one hundred and nineteen thousand four anna pieces, and forty thousand eight anna pieces were distributed; and when this fund was exhausted, ten or twelve thousand [rupees] were brought forth and cut up into halves and quarters; but still one-fourth of the poor went away empty-handed, and this has cast no little stain on the character of the Baboo. The *Chundrika* says that the distribution of money among the countless beggars who assembled on these occasions, can never be conducted with propriety, and invariably entails disgrace. We wish all the rich natives in Calcutta could be brought to the same opinion. The cause, in the present instance, the Editor of that paper ascribes to the impatience of those in whose house the beggars had been crammed, to get quit of their unwelcome guests; and he says that many of them opened their gates, and liberated the captives before the distributors arrived. The *Prabhakur* gives a different version of the story. He affirms that this disappointment is not to be attributed to the family who celebrated the *shraddu*; that they shrank from no expense; that there was no deficiency whatever. But, says he, some of the great beggars who presided at the distribution of the pittance among the poor beggars, put the bags of money which had been entrusted to them into palanquins, and made away with them. That others, after having begun the distribution, suddenly exclaimed that there was not a sufficiency of money; and under pretence of going to the Baboo's house for a further supply, got into their

palanquins, and decamped [with] whatever they could carry off; and that the door-keepers, having waited long for their return in vain, at length liberated the starving and clamorous multitude. Such acts of dishonesty are now invariably practised, whenever a *shraddu* is of sufficient magnitude to create confusion and to afford an opportunity for plunder.

*Friend of India*, November 1, 1838

## VI

The Wealthy Parvenu. The *Chundrika* has a long article in praise of the liberal Deb Narayun Deb . . . Deb Narayun Deb was a Native sirkar in Calcutta, who acquired a very large fortune within a few years by his own skill, industry and perseverance, and by his practical knowledge of that science, which teaches the value of the sixty-fourth part of a rupee; . . . a science which as one of our most intelligent Native friends has assured us Europeans in India are extremely dull in acquiring. Having obtained wealth, he was anxious to "get into society" . . . and he is now acknowledged as one of the most respectable men in the metropolis. A year or two ago he was advised to weigh his mother in the scales with the precious metals, and to give them away to the Brahmuns. This year he has been persuaded to hold a large assembly for several months, to have the Ramayun and the Shree Bhagvat read in Sungskrit [Sanskrit]. This is an act of very high religious merit. . . . The [editor of] *Chundrika* [the journal of the orthodox community] who acted as master of the ceremonies, has chronicled the event in glowing terms. We have translated the article entire. . . .

"That most excellent Baboo Narayun Deb, of Entally, has been in the habit, from time to time, of performing voluntary religious acts, and of giving large sums of money to the Brahmuns and Pundits. . . . For several years he had given away his own and his mother's weight of the precious metals. Instead of repeating this gift in the present year, he has appointed Pundits to read the Shree Bhagvat, and the Ramayun of Valmeeki, and to explain the meaning. This great act began at the commencement of Falgoun, and closed on the 30th Choitree. On this occasion he invited the Pundits from Footeegoda (?) in the south and Nuddea in the

north. From all these places the most renowned of the literate were invited; in Calcutta, the invitation was extended to all the Pundits, those of the first, of the middling, of the lower ranks, connected with the four great parties, which are associated with the Dhurma Subha. More than three hundred cards of invitation were issued. The scale of gifts was thus regulated. To each of the first class of Pundits from Nuddea, Santipore, and other places in the north, 120 rupees and a brass water-pot; to those of the lowest class, 75 rupees. To each of the first class of Pundits from Trivence and Jonae, 100 rupees, to those of the lowest ranks, 40 rupees [per head]. To the Pundits of the city of Calcutta, and of the south, 30 rupees to the best, and 15 rupees to the lowest. In addition to this, he granted two hundred invitations to those who came masked, and on the importunity of friends, to men thus invited, he gave from eight rupees with a brass water-pot to three rupees with a brass dish.

"How shall we describe the presents which were made to the Readers; to those [who] corrected the Readers; to those who watched over the Reader and the Corrector, and to the Hearer. He has perfectly satisfied these four classes, this is saying enough. Each Reader (how many there were, we are not told; sometimes twelve are engaged) received 120 rupees. Each Corrector of the Reader received between 100 and 110 rupees. Those who were appointed to watch over both Reader and Corrector obtained from 70 to 80 rupees; and each Hearer, from 60 to 70 rupees. Besides these gifts, he gave away various articles of food comprised in the term Huvishunna; and clothes, and golden and silver ornaments, and carpets. To the individual who explained these works he gave 250 rupees as his dismissal fee; and 4 rupees as a daily refresher, and sometimes even more. On the last day, moreover, a grand feast was prepared for the Brahmuns. All the learned Pundits who were invited were satisfied and called down blessings on the Deb Baboo, because he was a most liberal man, and one who maintained the rules of the Dhurma Subha. We are inclined to think that he has come to the determination to patronize only the Pundits who follow the rules of that Society."

*Friend of India*, April 26, 1838

## VII

A Distinguished Marriage: The marriage of the daughter of Baboo Rooplal Mullick to Baboo Rajendra the adopted son of Baboo Nilmany Mullick was happily celebrated on Monday the 5th of Aghrayan last. We understood that because Rajendra Baboo is in his minority the property obtained from his father is in the hands of the masters of the Supreme Court but his friends drew from it the sum of rupees fifty thousand for the expenses of his marriage. All may judge what would be done by the expenditure of fifty thousand rupees. As to Rooplal Baboo he is marrying his daughter it is true but his expenditure could not have been greater had it been his own son. He was profuse in the expenses of musicians, gift and charity.

*Chandrika* as quoted in *John Bull*, 13th December, 1830

## VIII

[What follows is a nearly literal translation, with the omission of a few lines and words, of a report which appeared in the orthodox and popular Bengali journal *Samachar Chandrika*, December 1, 1856. The report is fully reproduced in N. N. Laha, *Subarnabanik Katha O Kirti*, vol. I, pp. 38-40.]

A Grand Marriage: Babu Sri Hiralal Sil, eldest son of late Babu Motilal Sil, "the Mansion of Opulence", celebrated the marriage of his younger brother, Hiralal Sil, to the daughter of the highly reputed Kashinath Mallik, "the Mansion of Renown", on a scale unprecedented in this city. Ten days before the date of marriage the Sils started distributing bucketfuls of oil, salverfuls of sweets along with fine clothes and other auspicious things among nearly two thousand respectable Brahmin and Kayastha families in this city and nearby towns. Besides, they sent silver salvers with almonds, grapes, dates, aromatic essence and roses to the houses of Marwari, Armenian and Mugal [mercantile] aristocrats in this city. To the Brahmin merchants they sent woollen cloth, handfuls of money, etc. as a token of social respect. Among their devoted relatives and ministerial staff the Sils distributed two hundred rupees per person, and shawls, kerchiefs, etc. . . . The servants got dresses of broadcloth and silver bowls. How long can we continue describing the extent of distribution of

gifts! Nor is the celebration of music, dance and songs on a less grand scale. For nearly one mile from Pataldanga [a College Street area] to Tulabazar [Cotton Street] there was attractive illumination along both sides of the street for three nights. During those nights there were musical and dance performances attended by prestigious Bengali, Muslim, Armenian, Hindustani and Sindhi merchants and noblemen. On the night of marriage there was a fantastic combination of . . . artificial mountains, models of steamship, peacock-shaped boats and English band along the street from the house of the bridegroom to the house of the bride. The scale on which Babu Hiralal Sil organised the street illumination was unprecedented in the opulent society of Calcutta. The bridegroom's party proceeding to the bride's house consisted of not less than two thousand people. In the party there were Brahmins and Kayasthas of prestigious families, the leading representatives of Sobhabazar Raj family, noblemen from Sindh, aristocratic merchants and European attorneys close to the family. Let common people consider how many carriages, palanquins and . . . accompanied the procession. The father of the bride received the bridegroom's party with equal grandeur. We could have written more if space permitted.

## IX

The *Bombay Standard* mentions that the report that Baboo Shama Churn Mullick intends to release from prison all Calcutta Small Cause Court debtors on the approaching Durga Pujah has brought an enormous accession to the ordinary business of the Court. Probably many fictitious actions are now being instituted in which the defendant will collude with the plaintiff for the purpose of obtaining a decree and when the debtor is released both will divide the spoil.

*Friend of India*, September 22, 1859

## APPENDIX XV

### THE DHARMA SABHA — A CRITICAL VIEW

#### Dharma Sabha

At the Dharma Sabha, on the 23rd August, Raja Kalee Krishna in the chair, the secretary said that one Omachurn Bose, who was transported to Prince of Wales Island, and took his meals on board ship, had been returned about a year, solicited a document, specifying the articles of his atonement, whereby he may be readmitted into the Hindoo community. The Pundits, after an hour's deliberation, declared their opinion that the applicant should be required to give 749 Kahuns of Cowrees [roughly one hundred rupees worth of shell currency] to Brahmins. The chairman proposed that the opinion, written and signed by the Pundits, should be stamped with the Sabha's seal. The motion was seconded by Raja Kalee Krishna, and unanimously adopted with an addition, that the document should bear upon it a declaration from the secretary, confirming the decision of the Pundits.

Radhacant Deb, one of the native justices of the peace, was present, concurring in these proceedings. This circumstance has elicited the following remarks from the *Reformer* [a Young Bengal journal] :

“Viewing the proceedings we have above noticed in the light we have represented them, we ask, can any man, who is at all prone to evil deeds, look upon a magistrate who was known to absolve the greatest criminals on the payment of 100 rupees' worth of cowries to the Brahmans, with any respect or awe? Certainly not. On the contrary, he is likely to look upon such a magistrate as the absolver of all criminals, and hope to find favour in his eyes. On these grounds, we cannot but consider that the character which a magistrate ought ever to maintain, is incompatible with any connection with a society, the proceedings of which are of the description we have shown those of the Dharma Sabha to be. We therefore think our worthy magistrate, from whose future acts we have much to expect, will relinquish all connection with such a society as the Dharma Sabha, or which would be far better, but which we fear is a really Herculean task, reform that society, and, from a patron of ignorance,

superstition, and crime, change it into one of an opposite character."

From. *The Asiatic Journal*, February 1836, pp. 118-20

Radhacant Deb and the Dharma Sabha: The *Reformer*, in animadverting upon the occurrence in the Dharma Sabha, recorded in p. 118, observes: "From certain changes that have lately taken place, we have far better hope of the Babu relinquishing the Dharma Sabha, and abjuring all those superstitions at least which may be revolting to humanity and at variance with the principles of social morality, than of that orthodox assembly harkening to any salutary advice with which the Babu might, in a reforming spirit, think proper to favour it. Our readers, no doubt, remember that, about two years ago, Babu Radhacant Deb and his cousin, Raja Kalikrishna Bahadur, objected to sit on the grand jury, on the plea, that there they might be called on to take a part in the conviction of brahmins, which they then stated was repugnant to their religious notions. But Babu Radhacant Deb has now thankfully accepted the appointment of a magistrate, and has, therefore, it would appear, no objection to sit in judgment over brahmins, and even order them, if found guilty, to the House of Correction, or hand them over for severer punishment to the sessions. We take blame to ourselves for having overlooked this favourable change in the sentiments of this distinguished leader of the orthodox party until this occasion, and omitted to congratulate our enlightened countrymen on so signal a victory of light over darkness, of truth over error, of knowledge over ignorance, and of virtue over vice. From such a change we have to hope for a thousand blessings to the superstitious portion of the community. What is the reform of a hundred Hindoo College boys, compared with this glorious instance of change in one who had been nursed in the cradle of superstition, and imbibed its baneful doctrines with the very first breath he drew? The accession of such a man to the cause of reform is a glorious event, and ought to gladden the heart of every friend to knowledge and truth. From this happy change, then, we have to anticipate that our worthy magistrate will exert his utmost to reform the Dharma Sabha, which, if he cannot, consistency, it is to be hoped, will cause him to dissolve every connection with so unhallowed an association."



The Dharma Sabha was established about five years and a half ago, by some of the leading members of native society in Calcutta, for the purpose of restoring the rite of Suttce, which had just been prohibited by government. When the rejection of the petition was made known to the Sabha, in the bitterness of disappointment, they turned their wrath on all their fellow countrymen who had shown themselves in the smallest degree favourable to the cause of abolition, excluded them from the communion of the society, and decreed that any who might associate with them, or resort to their assemblies, or accept invitations or gifts from them, should be equally placed under the interdiction. To comprehend the force of this excommunication, it is necessary to observe that Hindoo Society in Calcutta is divided into various sections or parties, at the head of each of which stands some [belonging to a] distinguished family, . . . [whose] pre-eminence is in some measure hereditary. The leading Hindoo families are associated with one or other of these parties, and with each of them is also connected a certain number of pundits. When a feast is given, in consequence of a birth, marriage, death, a religious festival, or the investiture with the Bramhuncal thread, invitations are sent chiefly to the members who are comprised in the party, and to the learned men, whose chief dependence, indeed, for a livelihood, consists in the gifts bestowed on these occasions. Of these parties, the leaders of eleven are among the directors of the Dharma Sabha: viz. Rajas Goope Mohun Deb, Kalee Krishua Deb, and Rajnarayun Roy; and Baboos Pronnath Chowdree, Raj Krishna Chowdree, Joynarayun, Ooduychurn Dutt, Kalachand Bosoo, Shreenath Surbadeekaree, Buguvutteechn Gangoollee, and Ramratun Roy. These men enjoy great power from the privilege which they arrogate to themselves of excluding any man from their sections, which leads to his exclusion also from all the other sections. The plan pursued by the Dharma Sabha, on discovering that any individual has held intercourse with one who is favourable to the abolition of Suttce, is to place him at the ban of the society, and to issue a letter from the "Holy Office", to the heads of these sections, to notify his excommunication. He is then excluded from all social communion with any of the parties, and becomes . . . [virtually] an outcast. It often happens\* that the proscribed individual, borne down by the weight of general censure, is

subdued into submission, and is brought humbly to supplicate his restoration to society, on a promise of implicit obedience in future to the mandates of this inquisition. His submission is sometimes accepted, and his offence forgiven. The fact is then attested by the head of his party; a record is made of it in the "Holy Office"; and a circular letter is written to the heads of the other parties to announce the event. The proceedings of the Sabha for the last twelve months have consisted of little else but the receipt of secret information regarding the visits of individuals to those who have been excommunicated, and the exertions made to involve the suspected person in the same infamy. Thus, under the plea of zeal for the Hindoo religion, an odious system of espionage is established, and the greatest oppression practised. The authority of the Sabha is thus kept up by a series of iniquitous censures on individuals, whose only crime is their having, perhaps, accepted a friendly invitation to a wedding at the house of someone who is known to approve of the merciful regulation which prohibits female immolations. The last instance of the kind which has occurred, had reference to Gokool Chunder Bosoo, of Krishnugur, who had been expelled from the party of which Baboo Asootosh Deb is the head, for having associated with Radhikaprasad Roy, the son of the late Rammohun Roy. He has since been restored to society, on which occasion the following circular was issued:

OFFICE OF THE DHARMA SABHA

Calcutta, 15th Sraban, 1242.

Shree Gokool Chunder Bosoo, of Krishnugur, of the party of Baboo Asootosh Deb, having been suspended from all intercourse, on account of his associating with Radhikaprasad Roy, who is guilty of having been rejected by the Dharma Sabha, the Deb Baboo according to his own wisdom, and the rules of the Dharma Sabha, has forgiven his offence and received him into society. Thinking it right to inform you of this fact without delay, a copy of Deb Baboo's letter is sent with this note.

This circumstance has given rise to much correspondence in the native papers. Those who disapprove of these tyrannical proceedings, have not been backward in examining the character of

this orthodox party, which so pompously receives back a suspended member, and they have published the singular fact, that this party broke off from another, and was formed into a separate party, simply because the leading family received back into its communion Kaleeprasad Dutta, who had become a Moosulman, and submitted to the initiatory rites! and they jeer [at] the party with saying, that those who are guilty of Kaleeprasadism may well receive back one who is suspected of Rammohun-Royism. Such is the consistency of the orthodox directors of the Dharma Sabha, and such the value of their censures. . . .

From *Friend of India* (date not mentioned), quoted in *The Asiatic Journal*, March 1836, pp 163-65

## APPENDIX XVI

### THE EUROPEAN PENETRATION INTO THE ECONOMY OF CALCUTTA

Colonization or the Cultivation of Land by the English (from the *Samachar Darpan* of Saturday, 9 January, 1830).

If colonization be permitted, the English will come in excessive numbers, and setting themselves on the land engage in the cultivation of the soil and establish many manufactories. Some have imagined that this will increase general wealth and happiness, but this is a fallacious hope, for there are many proofs which plainly show that through their engaging in manufactures the natives of this country are reduced to the greatest distress. The state of Ireland will show the happiness which would flow from their becoming Jumindars [zamundars] and Talookdars. On the subject of their following trades [in this country] I will adduce a few examples.

*Builders.* Twenty years ago when there were no English builders in this metropolis, Sultan Ajuddeen Chand and many other native builders acquired fortunes by following that trade. Their grandeur is still in the remembrance of many, but some English Mistrees [artisans] came here and monopolized entirely that trade. Among them Bruce and Smylie, Burn and Curriel and others, having acquired many lakhs of rupees, some returned to their own country, some began to wield the pen. The unfortunate Mistrees left their trowels and put on a turban. When that was gone, they took to the spade, now they are in a state of starvation. I therefore judge that through the English Mistrees' having taken up the trade the native Mistrees have been completely ruined.

*Carpenters.* In this occupation the Pals and others formerly acquired much wealth and their descendants are still celebrated and in affluence through the money thus obtained. But then came Rolt and Co. and other English carpenters, and took possession of that trade, and the deceased Ramtanoo Ghose and other natives relinquished the rule and took to the chisel, and starvation is now their lot.

*Goldsmiths.* In this branch Shiva Mistree and many others accumulated large fortunes. But Hamilton & Co. came and

entered on the trade, and the native goldsmiths can now scarcely gain half a meal a day. Nor can anyone say that any native Mistree is acquiring wealth.

*Tailors.* How many natives such as Ramjaun Ostaghar and others acquired property in this occupation! They bought lands and houses, and were reckoned among the wealthy. But Gibson & Co. and Simpson & Co. came here, and those who lived by the needle, leaving out of the question all further purchasing of estates, are through want of food become as thin as a needle.

*Boats.* Formerly the Duttas and others by letting out sloops acquired large fortunes. Now the English have established boat offices, let out boats and are become ghut manjees [boatmen at ferry points] and thus the sloops and budgerows [large boats] of the natives above mentioned to the extent of many lakhs of rupees, swimming down the stream, are become water [a popular simile].

Judge then to what distress four or five manufacturers who have taken the trade of this city have reduced the natives. Can you then determine what fatal consequence will ensue from their coming in greater numbers?

Translated from the original Bengali and published in  
*Calcutta Monthly Journal*, January 1830, pp 90 - 91.

## APPENDIX XVII

### VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS (INDIAN & EUROPEAN WITH SIGNIFICANT INDIAN PARTICIPATION) IN CALCUTTA AND THE IMMEDIATE SUBURBS

(Asterisks indicate European participation and in some cases domination.)

<i>No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Active period</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
1.	Atmiya Sabha	1815-20	Religious and social reforms
*2.	Calcutta School Book Society	1817—continued	Educational
*3.	Agricultural and Horticultural Society	1820—continued	Name indicates
*4.	Calcutta School Society	1818—middle of '30s	Educational
*5.	Calcutta Unitarian Committee	1821-27	Religious
6.	Gaudiya Samaj	1823-24	Learned society
7.	Brahmo Samaj	1828—continued	Religious
8.	Academic Association	1828-31	Learned society
*9.	Asiatic Society	1784—continued [Indian participation not before 1829]	Learned society
10.	Dharma Sabha	1830—middle of '40s	To oppose certain social reform measures and to undertake functions of certain traditional social organisations.
11.	Anglo-Indian Hindoo Association	1830 [seems ephemeral]	Learned society
12.	Jnanasandipan Sabha	- do -	- do -
13.	Debating Club, Chorebagan [a locality in Calcutta]	- do -	- do -
14.	Bangaranjuni Sabha	- do -	- do -
15.	Calcutta Literary Society	1829 [seems ephemeral]	To safeguard the interests of traditional physicians
16.	Baidya Samaj	1831 [seems ephemeral]	

APPENDIX XVII—*contd.*

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Active period</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
17.	Sarvatattvadipika Sabha	1832-33	Learned society
*18.	District Charitable Society	1830—continued	Name indicates
19.	Bangabhasa Prakasika Sabha	1836-37	Learned society, which allowed political discussion
20.	Jnanachandradaya	1836 [seems ephemeral]	Learned society
21.	Calcutta Circulating Library	1839 [seems ephemeral]	Name indicates
*22.	Mechanics Institution	1839-43	Educational
23.	Tattvabodhini Sabha	1839-59	Religious and literary
24.	Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge	1838-43	Learned society
*25.	Landholders Society	1838-43 [attempted to be revived in 1849]	Political in general and safeguarding the interests of landholders in particular
26.	Bijnandayini Sabha	1841 [seems ephemeral]	Learned society
27.	Deshahitaishini Sabha	1841 [seems ephemeral]	Political
28.	Vidyamodini Sabha	1844 [seems ephemeral]	Religious
*29.	Bengal British India Society	1843-46	Political
*30.	Hindu Theophilanthropic Society	1843-44	Religious and literary
31.	Hindu Philadelphic Society	1843 [seems ephemeral]	Learned society
32.	Calcutta Phrenological Society	1845—about 1857	Name indicates
33.	Sarbasubhakari Sabha	1850 [seems ephemeral]	Social reforms
34.	National Association or Deshahitarthi Sabha	1851 [ephemeral]	Political
35.	British Indian Association	1851—continued	Political
*36.	Bethune Society	1851—about 1870 [nominally existed for another 20 years]	Learned society

37. Atmiya Sabha (of Akshay Datta)	1852-55	Religious
38. Saryajnan Sancharini Sabha, Bhawani- pur	1853—?	Religious
39. Behala Haribhakti Pradyayini Sabha	1852—continued	Religious
40. Association of Friends for the Promo- tion of Social Improvement	1854—about 1858	Social reforms
*41. Silpabidyotsahini Sabha	Several years since 1854	Educational
*42. Vernacular Literature Society	1851-62 [then continued as a depart- ment of the Calcutta School Book Society]	- do - Learned society Political Learned society
43. Bidyotsahini Sabha	1855—about 1865	Social reforms
44. Mahomedan Association	1855-1858?	Religious discussion
45. Young Men's Literary Society	About 1855 [seems ephemeral]	Religious
*46. British India Society (of Keshab Chandra Sen)	1856-62	Learned society
47. Goodwill Fraternity	1957 [seems ephemeral]	Learned society
48. Biswabandhu Sabha, Chorebagan	Sometime in the third quarter of the century [seems ephemeral]	Name indicates Philanthropy (?)
*49. Society of Arts and Sciences	1855 [seems ephemeral]	Name indicates
*50. Family Literary Club, Barabazar	1858—at least up to 1876	Name indicates
*51. Photographic Society	1856-76	Religious
52. Simla Hirabilsini Sabha	1859 [seems ephemeral]	Learned society
53. Mahomedan Literary Society	1863—continued	Philanthropy (?)
54. Sangat Sabha	1859—?	Name indicates
55. Bramhabandhu Sabha	1863—[soon defunct, it was revived in early '70s]	Religious
56. Brahmika Samaj	1864—?	- do - - do - (of woman)



# APPENDIX XVII—contd.

Sl.No.	Name	Active period	Purpose
*57.	Bengal Branch of British Medical Association	1863—continued	Name indicates
*58.	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to the Animals	1861—continued	Name indicates
*59.	Bengal Social Science Association	1867-78 (?)	Learned society Conservative social organisation, also undertaking certain practical social reforms
60.	Sanatan Dharma Rakshini Sabha	1869—about 1875	
61.	Indian Reform Association	1870-75	Social reforms
62.	Bama Hitaishini Sabha	1871-79	-do- especially for the improvement of women's education
63.	Shyambazar Subhadayini Sabha	Early '70s	Learned society
64.	Simulia Jnanotsahi Sabha	1871—?	-do -
65.	Tala Jnandipika Sabha	About 1870—?	-do -
66.	Bhagabadbhakti Pradayini Sabha (Sankharitola)	Formed sometime before 1871 [duration not known]	Religious
67.	Students' Association	1875—continued	Name indicates
68.	College Re-union	1875—?	Re-union of Hindu College students
69.	Indian League	1875 [ephemeral]	Political
70.	Science Association	1876—continued	Cultivation of science
71.	Indian Association	1876—continued	Political

The list is taken from "Patterns of Participation in the Public Life of Bengal (1815-1876)", D. Phil thesis of Rabindra Bharati University by Rajat Sanyal.)

## APPENDIX XVIII

### "JULIUS CAESAR" IN CALCUTTA

#### The Jorasanko Theatre

The rage for theatre making has usurped in Calcutta the place of pyrotechnics and such tomfoolery. This is decidedly a change for the better. And although such playing as that which we witnessed on the evening of the instant at the Jorasanko Theatre is calculated [more] to disgust than amuse the lovers of the drama, yet as it aimed at establishing a rational principle we can find it in our hearts (notwithstanding the shockingly bad acting of the majority of performers) to applaud the spirit in which the theatre was got up. The scenery and stage decoration were extremely creditable, and with an efficient corps dramatique the Jorasanko Theatre could indeed be made the means of affording intellectual recreation to those who for want of better amusement now want to spend their money on the most contemptible species of pleasure. We understand that the proprietors of the Theatre have incurred considerable expense in fitting it up and it is a pity that their object should have been so woefully frustrated through an injudicious selection of the *dramatis personae*. The play of "Julius Caesar" requires skilful acting, but with the exception of Cassius and Casca, the performers sang or blustered through their parts in utter manglement of Shakespeare. Cassius was well represented by a young man named Juddonauth Chatterjea, an ex-pupil of the Oriental Seminary. The young gentleman seemed to feel what he acted and having by nature the advantage (?) of a "lean and hungry look", he did very well indeed for the Roman conspirator. We could wish that the other actors knew their parts as well. Brutus, though acted shriekingly enough by a burly young man with a very thick moustache, was nevertheless not so grating to the taste as Caesar or Calphurnia. The former roared and raved like either a maniac or a drunkard, the latter horribly coated over with paint and varnish squeaked like a pig or a ninny. As for Mark Antony, by Jingo! he looked more like an undertaker than a valiant Roman and the speech over the dead body of Caesar so thoroughly disgusted us that we

left the theatre before the weeping and wailing was over. We have a bit of wholesome advice for our young friends, who, we beg, will take our criticism in good part. We ourselves are the most steadfast admirers of the drama. Nothing will give us greater pleasure than to behold Shakespeare springing into new life under the histrionic talent of our educated countrymen but we cannot calmly look on while the old gentleman is being murdered and mangled. Let the Jorosankowallahs take in hand a couple of good Bengalee plays and we will promise them success. Or if Shakespeare is all the go, let them select intelligent performers, and at all events dismiss [sic] with the teaching of Mr. Clinger — that man will spoil everything.

From . *Hindoo Patriot*, May 11, 1854, pp. 148-49

Sri Apurba Kishore Goswami of Rabindra Bharati University helped me to collect materials for the appendices.

## POSTSCRIPT I

### SOME CALCUTTA NEIGHBOURHOODS—PAST AND PRESENT

Studies of the neighbourhoods of Calcutta are very few and those few are only preliminary surveys. Nevertheless, the available studies of Burrabazar, Bhowanipur and Ballygunge, however incomplete, are useful. Two related articles on Burrabazar–Pathuriaghat–Jorabagan area contributed by Meera Guha in *Man in India* (1964) deal with the distribution and concentration of communities in the area under study, which she broadly calls Burrabazar. She thus describes the concentration of communities: “In the north are the old concentrations of Subarnabaniks [gold merchants], Gandhabaniks [spice merchants], [Bengali] Brahmins and Kayastha families. The central zone has a mixed population of Tantubaniks [Bengali cotton merchants], Gandhabaniks and traders from Rajasthan. Transition is in progress—outgoing Bengali-speaking elements being gradually replaced by Hindi-speaking population . . . [in the] southern area there is a distinct change in population. Bustee population in the zones marked above also show a similar Bengali-speaking majority in the north, a mixed group of Bengali and Hindi speakers in the centre and a Hindi-speaking majority in the south [that is, Hindi-speaking population increases as one approaches Burrabazar proper or the core of the business area].” Guha found in Baniatola (literally, locality for merchants) descendants of some original mercantile families of Calcutta claiming to have settled in the city as far back as the 17th century, after the decline first of Saptagram (the Portuguese port on the river Saraswati above Calcutta) and then of Hooghly. The small group of priestly Brahmins in the north were said to have settled in the area when their ancestor, a Gossain from Khardah, a village traditionally famous as a settlement of priestly Brahmins of high status, was invited to act as the spiritual preceptor of Bengali mercantile families, to whom the descendants of the original Brahmin family are still attached as “gurus”. Besides the old mercantile and Brahmin families, there are a number of old zamindar families in the north-central area, represented by Dattas, Ghoshes and the senior branch Tagores. All these families were originally merchants and banians but after one or

two generations became zamindars and rentiers, the transition occurring in the early 19th century. These families are now subjected to heavy pressure from mercantile forces from Burrabazar proper.

The major concentration of businessmen from Rajasthan in Burrabazar developed, according to Guha, after the construction of railways (1870s and 1880s), when the western provinces of India were brought within the trading focus of Calcutta. Most of the immigrants had lived in Calcutta for nearly three generations. Guha found a large number of them engaged in small trade or employed in commercial companies owned by people from their home region. There are four predominant groups: Agarwal, Maheswari, Oswal and Saraogi. The Hindi-speaking population is mainly from Bihar.

In the Bengali-speaking north zone the institutional development is in a static state. Schools, gymnasias and libraries were established mainly in the 19th and early 20th century. The Oriental Seminary was founded in 1829, the Metropolitan Institution in 1887 and the Aryan Institute in 1887.

In the central mixed zone, the belt of transition is marked by a lack of compactness due to a situation where one set of economic and cultural standards is being succeeded by another. There is a lack of social integration and absence of educational institutions, recreational facilities, etc. There is, however, a new form of integration represented by the Timber Merchants' Association, founded in 1930, in which the Bengali and Rajasthani merchants have found a common platform, observes Meera Guha.

In the Hindi-speaking zone to the south there is a rich development of several stabilised institutions, such as schools, dispensaries and charitable institutions, established by Marwari businessmen. Guha mentions that there is some lack of integration between the Maheswari group and the Agarwal group.

The area of Pathuriaghat-Jorabagan in the north-central zone had, after the battle of Plassey in 1757, a population of Brahmins, Kayasthas, Subarnabaniks, Kangsabaniks (bell-metal merchants), Sunri (liquor merchants) and Tantubayas (cotton merchants and weavers). Gradually trade from the south, that is, Burrabazar, began to invade the area. Smaller families started moving out, so much so that only a shell of the old population remains. These few remaining families retain an oyster-like existence within the area.

New residents are the non-Bengali traders, refugees who have occupied deserted houses and a bustee population. The core of the old settlement precariously survives in the northern parts side by side with bustees. The floating population of "coolie" (porter) labour is employed in the "postas" (wholesale markets and storage spaces). The early feature of this locality was the residential character of its population, a number of families which at one time had flourished because of their relationship with the British (Ghoshes, Tagores, Mulliks of Pathuriaghat and Mitras of Jorabagan).

The study of Bhowanipur by Anjana Roy Choudhury (*Man in India*, 1965) contains some significant data. The original settlement, according to her, took place along the Adi Ganga or the old course of the Hooghly river—a traditional manufacturing and trading belt the remnants of which are still visible from the layout of streets and buildings and location of temples. These remnants survive also in names like Kansaripara (locality for bell-metal manufacturers and traders), Sankharipara (locality for conch-shell makers and traders), Potopara (locality for earthenware and image-makers), Telipara (locality for oil merchants), etc. The original settlers, artisans and traders belonging to artisan castes, are said to have migrated from Saptagram, the port above Calcutta which declined in the 16th century, to Gobindapur, a village from which the settlers were displaced when it was selected as the site for the new Fort William in 1758. After their removal from Gobindapur, Roy Choudhury tells us, bell-metal manufacturers went to Simla Kansaripara (a north-eastern locality of Calcutta), while bell-metal traders settled in Kansaripara in Bhowanipur. Similarly, a split occurred in the community concerned with trade and manufacture of conch-shell articles—most traders settling in Bhowanipur while most manufacturers moved to Baghbazar in north Calcutta.

The Kansari community, still occupying a distinct and extensive area in Bhowanipur, shifted to goldsmiths' and silversmiths' profession, which is still continued. The shift might have occurred in the early decades of this century. Some enterprising members of the community also started manufacturing hackney carriages. During the two World Wars a number of Kansari families manufactured brass buttons, badges and buckles. A section of the Kansari community, though highly conservative in social attitudes

and practices, proved flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances. A recent trend is the manufacture of parts of electric machinery and of surgical instruments for hospitals and colleges in Calcutta. In all these occupations the original skill and experience of the Kansaris in handling metal proved valuable.

In the case of the Sankharis, there has been, according to Roy Choudhury, a total shift from traditional occupation. The Potos or the community of potters, however, stick to their original occupation of image-making and manufacture of earthenware. They too occupy a distinct area along the eastern bank of the Adi Ganga, numbering about forty families.

The area along the Adi Ganga, that is, the old Bhowanipur, is a well-integrated old residential area with narrow, meandering lanes and by-lanes. Local solidarity can be observed not only in population composition, livelihood pattern, social functions and religious rites, but also in the physical layout. A very different social scene is observed along the two main traffic arteries in Bhowanipur, where the work of the Improvement Trust in the twenties and the thirties of this century disturbed the traditional localities and started a new urbanising process with a more complex economic and social pattern than in the eastern part of Bhowanipur along the Adi Ganga. A new community element was introduced in the early twenties with the advent of the Sikhs, many of whom, on retirement from military service, took to professions connected with transport. A French taxi company, the Indian Taxi, trained them to become drivers. This company was the nucleus around which the Sikh community grew, according to Roy Choudhury. From drivers they became owners mainly after the Second World War, also moving into transport business, that is, carriage of goods in trucks and lorries, and ownership of shops selling motor parts, paints, varnishes, etc. Hotel-keeping and tailoring developed as side businesses.

In the eastern part of Bhowanipur there has developed in recent years a distinct area of Gujarati-speaking people—a settlement which, with its rich economic base, has a forceful impact on land values and rent, putting the Bengali middle class at a disadvantage as in some other developing areas in Calcutta.

Historically, Bhowanipur was dominated by a professional middle class, which, from about the late 19th century to the early decades of this century, was the most dynamic element in Bengali

society. In Bhowanipur this class consisted primarily of people connected with the legal profession and secondarily, of doctors. Roy Choudhury produces as evidence of this dominance the fact that in the annual report of a local philanthropic society for 1891 all the members on the list were barristers, advocates, vakils, district judges and attorneys, with Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, the High Court Judge, as President, and Sir B. C. Mitter, Member of the Privy Council, as one of the members.

The growth of a distinct middle class residential area within a structure largely determined by social forces connected with the services, teaching and the professions is typically represented by Ballygunge, comprising the extreme south-eastern wards of Calcutta proper, in the first three decades of this century. Land records and revenue survey maps in the Alipur collectorate in Calcutta as well as stray references in reports make it clear that Ballygunge was an extensive stretch of swamp, interspersed with hutments, agricultural plots and occasional gardens, from the late 18th to the first decade of this century. Only in the northern part of the area there was a highly developed European and Indo-European neighbourhood, which tended to expand to the east and the south along a narrow wedge up to the thirties of this century. The process gave rise to fashionable neighbourhoods of Ballygunge Circular Road, Old Ballygunge Road, Queen's Park and Mandeville Gardens, with houses owned or rented by Europeans and Europeanised rich Indians. In the vast area outside this zone land was owned by non-resident Bengali zamindar families like the Tagores, while smaller plots were owned or held under various conditions by Bengali Muslims and people belonging to Hindu agricultural and fishing castes.

An idea of the pattern of growth of some of the wards in Ballygunge can be obtained from an unpublished report prepared by Samik Banerjee, who worked with Professor N. K. Bose, the anthropologist, on a social survey of Calcutta. The following narrative is in part taken from Samik Banerjee's report.

The middle class settlement in Ballygunge had its beginnings along the road adjacent to the station on the railway line connecting Calcutta with the south 24-Parganas. This was happening from the first decade of this century. Some of the earliest settlers in the area were people from Kasba, on the other side of the railway • track, which was a much older settlement divided into the tradi-



tional types of caste-based localities. The first of the new settlers in the Station Road area was Roy, who had a number of houses in Kasha. It was Roy who brought in Nyayaratna, a Sanskrit scholar, followed by Vidyabhusan, Shastri and Banerjee, all three of them well-known scholars. New people continued to come in. But the face of the locality was not much changed even in the early twenties. Cornfields and cultivated patches remained, the houses standing far apart from one another. In 1933, Maitra, a retired professor, and Sinha, a Corporation Councillor, set up the Ballygunge Bank, which started as a Land and Housing Corporation. A large area was developed by this bank. The rent purchase scheme, insurance scheme and instalment scheme enabled quite a number of people to have their own modest houses on small plots of land in the area.

Banerjee, who was the owner of considerable landed property in the ward next to Roy's, was an eminent professor of Sanskrit College and Calcutta University. He came over to Ballygunge in 1906. In his locality he established a girls' school. Banerjee is remembered in the locality for his social activity, which must have been very important in the early stage of the formation of a neighbourhood. One of his collaborators was Shastri, an early settler. Among others who co-operated with Banerjee were a number of younger people who had settled in the area. An association for helping the poor was established in 1926, two of the organisers being a young lecturer and a young engineer. Banerjee got Roy interested in the idea of a boys' high school for the locality. The institution was founded in 1914; Roy provided the finance while the organisational part was tackled by Banerjee. A students' association was organised by Jana, a school teacher. The association held regular games and debates, and also organised a co-operative store.

Two other schools in the area, one for boys and another for girls, were founded in the late thirties. A library was organised in 1932 and about that time a club for boys.

Among those who settled in the area in the twenties were two barristers, one lawyer, a contractor, a doctor, two professors, and some owners of urban landed and house property. In the thirties there was a spurt of building activity when people of generally modest but steady income settled in the area. On the road on which the present writer has been living for about forty years

there were seven houses from 1938 to 1950, all these seven houses having been built between 1935 and 1940. The ownership pattern is significant—a subordinate government officer, a subordinate judge, a deputy magistrate, a university lecturer, a lawyer, a cashier, and a contractor (non-resident). The area served by this road was developed by a private developing agency.

The foregoing is a broad account of the growth of Ward 61. The contiguous Ward 63 was originally inhabited by a number of Muslim families who had left a mosque in the area. The new batch of settlers began to arrive from the early twenties after a developing agency had bought some plots of land in the area. In the first group of new settlers was a superintendent of the Bengal Secretariat. In the mid-thirties the Calcutta Improvement Trust had completed the development of part of the area through a programme lasting about a decade. The men who first settled here were retired government officers, a retired presidency magistrate, three retired deputy magistrates, and the principal of a leading college of Calcutta.

It is, however, possible to exaggerate the middle class character of the settlement in Ballygunge. A part of Ward 62 had slums and industrial concerns from the twenties and still retains this character. The huts are now mostly owned by people on the fringe of the lower middle class, making payment to the landowners, mostly upper middle class people depending partly on income from real estate. Nearly all the hutowners live in the slums. The tenants who pay rent to the hutowners are mostly domestic servants and maidservants (the largest proportion, according to Samik Banerjee's report), carpenters, porters, mechanics and bricklayers. So far as the present writer's memory serves him, a very large slum in his own ward (no. 61) had a similar composition in the late thirties and early forties with the exception that milkmen from Bihar and U.P. were quite prominent. The Ballygunge slum population has a larger proportion of people dependent on middle class households (part-time domestic servants and maidservants) and middle class consumption (milkmen, for example) than the slum population in the older localities having close association with business centres, traditionally rich families, and hereditary caste occupations.

A section of population in the slum-dominated part of Ward 62 consists of Sikhs, who are likely to have been an offshoot of the

Bhowanipur community. The nucleus of the Sikh settlement formed in the thirties. The most prominent non-Bengali immigrant group in Ballygunge has for a long time been south Indians concentrated in a portion of Ward 62. They have always been white-collar employees in central government offices or commercial firms. The south Indians had settled by the turn of this century in Ramkrishnapur in Howrah. Later on, a settlement had grown up around the group of outstanding south Indian scholars (Sir C. V. Raman, Dr. Radhakrishnan and others) who had come over to Calcutta. It was the Bowbazar settlement which later moved southwards. The bulk of the south Indian community which settled here came from Tamilnadu and Kerala with a sprinkling of people speaking Telegu and Canarese. The National High School, the prominent south Indian school in Ballygunge, took its present shape in the thirties. The community, however, does not seem to be permanently settled like the Sikhs and the Marwaris in Calcutta.

## POSTSCRIPT II

### LINGUISTIC AND REGIONAL GROUPS IN CALCUTTA—THE PHENOMENON OF REGIONALISM IN URBAN SETTING

Studies of linguistic or regional groups in the metropolitan cities of India are very few. N. K. Bose has done pioneering work in this field by mapping out certain residential clusters, indicating the distribution of linguistic and regional groups in Calcutta. Such maps are extremely useful and visually satisfying but are not accompanied by details which can be vitally significant for the historian or the anthropologist. William Row's study of a regional group in Bombay is limited to immigrants from one village in U.P. He has followed an interesting method of dealing with an immigrant group by placing it alongside the village society it has come from. Other studies of these groups are statistical surveys of migration, which might be technically of a high order but are not quite meaningful from the point of view of social and cultural interaction of groups. In this section I will try to explore the historical process of formation of regional groups in Calcutta in a setting of interaction with the locally dominant society and culture of the Bengalis.

The earliest positive reference to any linguistic or regional group in historical source material concerns the Oriyas. A writer in the *Asiatic Annual Register* (1799), describing his journey through Balasore in Orissa, writes: "From this part of Orissa come all those people called by the English Balasore bearers. . . . Seven thousand of the stalwart young fellows go into Bengal and are employed as chairmen ["chair" means "palanquin"], leaving their families behind." He also refers to the caste organization of the Oriya palanquin-bearers in Calcutta: "The bearers in Calcutta form a Commonwealth. They have a president and hold frequent councils . . . [when] any resolution is formed, neither stripes nor bonds must cause any member to secede. They have gained their present ascendancy by taking advantage of the heat of the climate and the indolence of the English; for if a person incurs the displeasure of this Worshipful Society, he may walk till he dies of a fever." The writer indirectly remarks that in their own region, that is, Balasore in Orissa, they lacked such an organisation.

This impression about the prominence of the Oriya palanquin-bearers in Calcutta is confirmed by other sources. Thus, Solvyns, a Flemish artist, who completed four large tomes of pictorial material with notes in French and English between 1790 and 1808, presents pictures of Oriya palanquin-bearers with this observation: "They are under Sardars or chiefs who meet together and establish rules which a private carrier does not dare to disobey. They refuse to render service when they disagree with the employers over some lines of conduct. . . . While they have no objection, for example, to brushing clothes, or even cleaning shoes, they will never extinguish a light otherwise than by agitating the air with their hands or with their clothes, and would lose their caste by blowing out with their breath." [I asked a priest of the Jagannath temple in Orissa whether this was credible. He said that he himself had the same scruple along with many others, particularly in the villages.]

The Oriya bearers, the Bengali journal *Samachar Darpan* reported on 27 February 1819, sent Rs. 3 lakhs annually to their homes in Balasore. An official publication of 1840 reported that there were ten thousand registered palanquin-bearers under an Oriya official supervisor, Hurripatti (very likely to be an Oriya name). It appears from contemporary engravings, including those by Solvyns, that at least a section of these Oriya bearers had the bearing of "labour aristocracy". The hey-day of the Oriya bearers was probably the late 18th and the early 19th century. Some research may be possible on the changing modes of transport in Calcutta, tracing the gradual decline of the palanquin and its replacement by horse-drawn carriages, which, by Indian tradition, is associated with Bihari and U.P. Muhamadans.

The Oriyas do not figure prominently in historical material after 1840. This may, however, be due to a gap in historical investigation. That a significant proportion of Calcutta municipal labour had been from Orissa from the late 19th century seems quite likely and the sphere might well have been plumbing in which the Oriyas still have a marked specialization. The other sectors in which the Oriyas figured in the early twentieth century (and do so even now) were domestic service (Census of Calcutta, 1921), work in the docks (Census 1921), gardening (Census 1911) and casual labour (Census 1921). From the report on the Census of Calcutta (1911) it appears that a large number of immigrants,

from Orissa were Khandayats by caste. This caste was closely associated with the Hindu Rajas of Orissa. A fact which is specially commented upon in the Calcutta Census Report of 1921 is that the "Oriya cook or coolie practically never brings any of his family with him". He is described as most "readily prepared to separate himself from his family".

The prominence of the Oriyas as cooks in the hotels and "messes" of Calcutta and as "haluikars" or expert cooks hired on contract for ceremonial occasions like marriages or *sradhs* has been so familiar a sight that it is rarely commented upon. As far as memories of most people go, the custom seems always to have been the same. A fact which has again not been seriously noticed is the guild-like organisation of Oriya domestic servants, particularly in hotels and "messes", and the "old" households now decaying and disappearing. I observed the working of a Bhowanipur "mess" (meaning, in Bengali, a non-profiteering and collectively run boarding house of Bengali white collar employees) which functions with clock-like regularity in the matter of serving meals from early morning to mid-day and then again from evening to nearly mid-night. Between the group of servants and cooks, on the one hand, and the Bengali boarders, on the other, there is a striking mutual understanding and trust. The dignity of the chief cook, assisted by servants from his own district, is reminiscent of the hey-day of Oriya workers in the age of the palanquin.

The fact that the Oriyas have been traditionally associated with Bengali households in Calcutta in domestic service can be attributed to the striking linguistic affinity and similarity of food habits between the Bengalis and the Oriyas.

The Bengalis had figured as an exploiting class in Orissa on a limited scale. Some Bengali families purchased zamindaris when, in former times, sales of Orissa landed estates were held in Calcutta. Many Bengalis settled in Cuttack where they started coming either with the British as office employees or as doctors, lawyers and teachers. A section of these old Bengali residents in Cuttack got nearly assimilated in the Oriya society in Cuttack and was described as *kera* Bengalis, after a curious jargon of their own, owing to their frequent use of the word *kara*, a corruption of the Oriya *kari*. So far as my experience goes, the *kera* Bengalis are now practically indistinguishable from the Oriyas.

Communication between middle class Bengalis and middle class Oriyas, particularly in the twenties and thirties of this century, was facilitated by the University of Calcutta, which had been known for its linguistic hospitality and was once the focal point of higher education throughout the eastern region. In recent years universities all over India, including those in Calcutta, have virtually ceased to discharge their valuable integrative functions owing partly to the growing use of local languages but mainly to the operation of local influence.

Every year, however, since the time of Chaitanya and with increasing intensity since the late 18th century, Bengalis have been resorting to Puri in Orissa in large numbers, some of them building houses there. Rows of houses, some of them ruined or semi-ruined now, bear evidence to a continuous injection of often hard-earned Bengali middle class money into that place of pilgrimage. It is well known how the priests of Jagannath temple can recite the genealogies of and the district and place names associated with the ancestors of many modern Bengalis who personally have only vague notions about them. The Bengali seems to have had a vague dissatisfaction with the absence in Bengal of concrete objects of association with his inherited mythology, such as impressive temples, sites hallowed by gods when they appeared on earth. Puri, along with Brindaban, Hardwar, Benares hold for the Calcuttans a charm and an appeal which shows no signs of diminishing in spite of progressive secularisation of outlook. This is clearly the continuation of a tradition, though its expression might have been changing from generation to generation.

Misunderstanding seems particularly likely to grow among kindred peoples who are neighbours to each other as between the Oriyas and the Bengalis or the Biharis and Bengalis. The emergence of the Bengali middle class as the most advanced community in India in the 19th century from the point of view of economic well-being as well as cultural and literary modernisation created a gap between the Bengali middle class and the retarded middle classes of Bihar, Orissa and Assam. Distrust of Bengali modernity as well as admiration for it have been curiously intermixed. With the growing crisis of the Bengali middle class, many old feelings have no validity in fact but nevertheless continue to influence attitudes as a matter of historical logic. If the Bengali is occasionally contemptuous and the Oriya occasionally resentful, that is to

a large extent influenced by the residuum of history.

Almost as closely related to the Bengalis in linguistic-literary culture and habits of food and attitudes have been the Maithilis of Bihar. These immigrants hail from such Bihar districts as Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur and parts of Champaran. The Bengali households have long been familiar with the "pure Brahmins" of Darbhanga as the most acceptable cooks by orthodox Hindu standards. But the most fruitful association has for centuries been at the cultural level. Vidyapati Thakur, who lived in the fifteenth century, wrote devout songs dealing with the love of Radha and Krishna in the pure Maithili of Darbhanga district. His songs had a tremendous influence on the lyrical tradition of eastern India. "They were adopted and enthusiastically recited by the celebrated Chaitanya (16th century), and through him became the house poetry of the Lower Provinces" (Grierson, *Linguistic Survey*, vol. 5, pt. 2). Communication at another level concerned the keenest intellects of the two regions involved in the development of the Indian Logic (Nyaya and Navyanyaya).

In the rush for English education and development of new themes for Bengali literature, intercourse with Mithila was neglected by the Bengalis for the greater part of the 19th and early 20th century. The orthodoxy of the Maithili Brahmins might have also acted as a hindrance to communication in spite of strong similarities in food habits and affinities in ethnic characteristics. The Maithilis, in their turn, leaned heavily in the direction of north-western India, that is, towards the hard core of the Hindusthani-speaking region—the United Provinces. "Like Bengali and Oriya, Maithili is a direct descendant of the old Magadha Apabhramsa. It occupies the original seat of that language, and still retains all its characteristic features. In one particular of phonetics alone does it depart from its parent, namely in the pronunciation of the sibilants. This is accounted for by the political influence of the North-West. The pronunciation of these letters is a literal shibboleth between Bengal and Central Hindusthan. A man who pronounces his *s*'s as *sh* would at once be known as a Bengali and treated as such. The Biharis . . . have striven after the pronunciation of the *s*'s of the west and have now acquired it, but that this is a comparatively modern innovation is clearly shown by the fact that, although they pronounce *s*, in the Kaithi national character they write *sh*, and use the very character which the Hindu gram-



marians employed to illustrate the *sh* sound which in their time was so characteristic of the tongue of Magadha" (Grierson).

Grierson identified the second group of Bihari immigrants in Calcutta as speakers of Magahi. The dialect is spoken in the districts of Patna, Gaya, Hazaribagh and some parts of Palamau, Monghyr and Bhagalpur. "Only in Patna it is infected with idioms belonging to the North-western Provinces (U.P.) by the strong Musalman element which inhabits that town, and which itself speaks more or less correct Urdu" (Grierson). According to the *Linguistic Survey* (Grierson, 1920-27) people from Magahi-speaking areas comprise the largest Bihari-speaking group in Calcutta. Traditionally these people are employed as shoe-makers or cobblers, carters and unskilled labour in jute mills.

The Magahi dialect was, according to Grierson, traditionally regarded as "boorish and rude by speakers of other Indian languages". "To a native of India one of its most objectionable features is its habit of winding up every question, even when addressed to a person held in respect, with the word *re*." How far this influenced Bengali attitude towards the Biharis of the region is difficult to determine. But some uncomplimentary words, once very much in vogue in Bengal about the Biharis, are now progressively regarded as indicating bad taste among educated Bengalis, especially after the wave of nationalist sentiment in Bengal in the early 20th century and the growth of Leftism from about that time with its intellectual attitude towards the workers and the poor. A sentiment for the hallowed historical sites of Gaya and Magadh has long been a part of Bengali mental make-up.

Another group of Bihari immigrants in Calcutta, the Bhojpuris, who, according to the *Linguistic Survey*, numbered 71,600 in Calcutta in the twenties of this century and were found in substantial numbers even in the interior districts of Bengal—40,900 in Murshidabad, for example—were in many respects fundamentally different from the other two Bihari immigrant groups. Standard Bhojpuri is spoken mainly in the districts of Shahabad, Ballia and Ghazipur, while western Bhojpuri is spoken in the western districts of Fyzabad, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Benares, the western half of Ghazipur and south Gangetic Mirzapur. Of the three Bihari dialects, Bhojpuri is the most western as well as most westward-looking. "Politically", as Grierson remarks, "it belongs rather to the United Provinces than to Bihar. It was from its neighbour-

hood that the famous Bundelkhand heroes, Alha and Udan, traced their origin, and all its traditions and associations point to the west and not to the east."

The Bhojpuri Brahmins and Rajputs loved to imagine themselves as heroes, carrying sturdy sticks. This self-image has been particularly fruitful. They once formed a rich source of recruitment to the Indian army. Thousands of them migrated to British colonies, some returning as rich men. Bengali landlords used to keep a number of these men as "darwans", mainly to hold the tenants in order. They had few scruples and invested a portion of their earnings in quick high-interest-bearing loans but at the same time earned a reputation for honesty. As a Subarnabanik student of mine, whose family (a large joint one) holds substantial landed property in Calcutta, remarked to me, these Bhojpuris could be trusted with large sums of money which they collected (rents from tenants in Calcutta houses, for example, or cash from banks), and that they had been serving many old and opulent Calcutta families for generations. The British also seem to have been particularly fond of them, and in most commercial houses, mostly situated on Clive Street or Dalhousie Square, they still form a very substantial element of the large community of watchmen.

Between the Bhojpuri and the Bengali the relation has been somewhat intriguing. At one time the Bhojpuris formed the highest element in the hierarchy of domestic employees in opulent Bengali households, mainly zamindari households. The code to which they systematically adhered made them strictly loyal to these families. With the steady decline in the fortunes of rich Bengali families, particularly zamindars, the Bhojpuris found other patrons like the Marwaris. Yet a substratum of understanding perhaps still remains, largely balancing the Bengali stereotype of the Bhojpuri as an over-corpulent being and the Bhojpuri stereotype of the Bengali as an unheroic bookwala, a stereotype not infrequently encountered by the Bengalis in north-western India. I have, however, come across quite a number of families of Bhojpuri origin nearly integrated within Bengali society, despite difficulties in the development of marriage ties. I have a feeling that the somewhat higher (but not too high) economic status of Bhojpuris has been a factor in the process of integration, though in Calcutta proper this had not gone very far. The barriers, on the side of the Biharis, have probably been a far more rigid caste

system than that prevalent in Bengal, a relative absence of middle class attitudes and the depressed economic status of the non-Bhojpuri Biharis. On the part of the Bengalis, there has been a basic social conservatism, pride in their recent cultural and intellectual achievements and a widely shared feeling that non-Bengalis are mere sojourners whose only object is money-making.

The distinguishing characteristics of non-Bengali immigrant groups in Calcutta have traditionally been extreme poverty and extreme prosperity. So far as the immigrants from Bihar and Orissa are concerned, hard manual labour has been combined with poverty, matched and to some extent exceeded only by the post-partition non-middle-class Bengali refugees. The poverty of the Bihari and the Oriya might almost have been taken as part of the natural order of things by previous generations of Bengalis. It was from about the thirties or so that groups of young Bengalis refused to accept this fact, but their exertions for the trade union movement touched only a fringe of organised labour, the vast majority of these immigrants from eastern India constituting the great mass of porters, carters and human carriers of different kinds in the unorganised sector.

Placed in a diametrically opposite position on the economic scale are the traditional merchant communities, especially Marwaris from Rajasthan, and some other groups from Gujarat and parts of U.P. The presence of Khattris as possessors of fabulous wealth in Dacca was noticed by Manrique as early as 1640. It is interesting to refer to this fact alongside the description of Khattris in J. N. Bhattacharjee's *Hindu Castes and Sects* (1896). In the section on "The Banyas of North India", Bhattacharjee observes, "In the Punjab, United Provinces, Behar and Calcutta the Khattris have almost the monopoly for the sale of all kinds of textile fabrics, from Cashmere shawls and Benares brocades to the cheap Manchester *dhotis* which are now hawked in the streets of the town by the shrill and familiar cry of 'three rupees to the rupee, four rupees to the rupee'. The majority of several classes of brokers are also of the Khatri caste."

The Khattris do not as a rule seem to have reached the western coast. They moved to the east, though they were to be found in Afghanistan and Central Asia, where they were the only Hindu traders. In *The Punjab Castes* (1916) Ibbetson remarks that the "Khatri traders are most numerous in Delhi and found in Agra,

Lucknow and Patna and are well known in the Burra Bazar of Calcutta. . . .” The Khattris, who were prominent in the business world of Calcutta before the sharp rise of the Marwaris, seem to have migrated mainly from U.P. Like the Bengalis of the earlier period they readily associated themselves with European firms as banians, brokers and agents but also carried on large-scale banking business. From an interview with Lala Babu, an octogenarian belonging to a very old Khatri family in Calcutta, and a person well known for his association with different forms of cultural expression in Calcutta, this writer got the impression that the Khattris of Calcutta enthusiastically absorbed some aspects of Bengali culture, especially those represented by the zamindar families. But it is difficult to ascertain how far this assimilation could proceed in the absence of realistic social ties like marriage relations.

The Marwaris were present in Calcutta, especially in the crucial sector of banking, long before the First World War, which was generally accepted as the starting-point of Marwari economic dominance and large-scale arrival of Marwaris in Calcutta. Data on the presence of the Marwaris and on Marwari business operations in early nineteenth century Calcutta have been presented in some recent publications (N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III; Thomas A. Timberg, “A Note on the Arrival of Marwaris”, *Bengal—Past and Present*, January-June, 1971).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Marwaris were already the strongest group among the traders and merchants in India. Tod (*Annals of Rajasthan*, vol. II, 1832) remarked that “more than half of the wealth of mercantile India passes through the hands of the Jain laity . . .”. Tod refers to the Oswals who were prominent in Bengal as bankers as early as the 18th century. The leading family was the well-known Jagat Seths of Murshidabad.

The *Rajputana Gazetteer* (vol. III-A, 1909) describes the Oswals as “by far the most numerous of the Mahajans or Banias (in Jodhpur State). More than 98% of them are Jains.” They “are said to be descendants of a number of Rajputs of different clans converted to Jainism in the second century and they take their name from the town of Osi or Osian, the ruins of which are to be found about thirty miles north of Jodhpur city.”

The *Rajputana Gazetteer* contains a passage which can be used as an explanation of the prominent concentration and continued

business tradition of the *bania* communities in the Jodhpur-Marwar region. "The trade of Marwar", it is observed in the *Gazetteer*, "in olden days was considerable, the state forming the connecting link between the sea coast and northern India. The chief mart was Pali, where the productions of India, Kashmir and China were exchanged for those of Europe, Africa, Persia and Arabia. Caravans from the ports of Cutch and Gujarat brought ivory, copper, dates, gum, borax, cocoanuts, broadcloths, silks, sandalwood, camphor, dyes, drugs, spices, coffee, etc. and took away chintzes, dried fruits, cumin seed, sugar, opium, silks, muslins, shawls, dyed blankets, potash and salt. The guardians of the merchandise were almost invariably *charans*, and the most desperate outlaw seldom dared to commit any outrage on caravans under the safeguard of these men, the bards of the Rajputs. If not strong enough to defend their convoy with sword and shield, they would threaten to kill themselves and would proceed by degrees from a mere gash in the flesh to a deep wound, or if one victim was insufficient, a number of women and children were sacrificed and the marauders declared responsible for their blood." Tod wrote thus about 1830 (quoted in the *Gazetteer*): "Commerce has been almost extinguished within the last twenty years, and, paradoxical as it may appear, there was ten-fold more activity and enterprise in the midst of that predatory warfare, which rendered India one wide area of conflict, than in these days of universal pacification. The torpedo touch of monopoly has had more effect on the caravans than the spear . . . of the outlawed Rajput; against its benumbing qualities the Charan's dagger would fall innocuous, it sheds no blood, but it dries up the channels."

It may be that, while the primary impulse in the earlier era might have been towards exploitation of greater opportunities, the expansion in the later phase was likely to have been impelled by the process of economic decline, that is, the loss of commercial opportunities in the home region. This hypothesis fits in with the fact of the growing volume of Marwari migration in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

The earlier migration to Bengal, and presumably to Burrabazar in Calcutta was mainly from the Jodhpur-Marwar region. From about the third decade of the nineteenth century there was a steadily increasing volume of migration from Shekhavati (north of Jaipur) and Bikaner, areas which had close links with the ori-

ginal nucleus of Rajasthan commerce in Jodhpur–Marwar. Ultimately they occupied the topmost position in Burrabazar. The Marwaris of Burrabazar got divided into two groups, viz. Kaniya (i.e. inhabitants of Jodhpur–Marwar) and Churuwale (i.e. inhabitants of Churu, Shekhavati and Bikaner).

The steady increase in the number of traders from Bikaner and their growing importance is clear from the trends of family histories available about the Marwari traders in Burrabazar (*Bharatiya Bapariyonka Parichaya*, Calcutta Division, Part II, 1929, as summarised in *Calcutta and Its Hinterland* (1976) by P. Banerjee). Recent studies in the history of Marwari firms in Calcutta also confirm this point.

Finally, however, the group that emerged into greatest prominence were members of Maheshawri and Aggarwal (the latter in a large majority) trading castes from the Shekhavati region, north of Jaipur. Almost all the large contemporary industrial establishments belong to this group.

Some of the first migrants are said to have maintained free hostels for new immigrants. "By a process of uncles calling nephews, and fathers-in-law sons-in-law to help them the Shekhavati merchant community in Calcutta grew.... The Shekhavati migrants also could draw on the banking services and serve as brokers of the larger sized Shekhavati firms." (Timberg)

By the end of the nineteenth century quite a number of Marwari firms, operating from Calcutta, and having interconnections in the sprawling Bengal hinterland, particularly in the jute-producing and jute-marketing areas, through agents, branches and representatives, had survived for decades (*Bharatiya Bapariyonka Parichaya*, quoted in *Calcutta and Its Hinterland*). The vital new opening in jute was virtually monopolised by them in the Calcutta market. Almost equally important was the establishment of their predominance in the wholesale market of imported cloth. Another important sector was trade in *kirana* (spices, seeds, etc.). Besides these, the Marwaris undertook commission agency, brokerage for British firms and pursued the highly effective, though traditional, calling of indigenous bankers (*shroffs*), which belonged to them long before they had come to dominate Bengal's internal trade, the cloth market and the jute market. At various stages the Marwaris had replaced, first, the Bengalis and then the Khatris from north India in the Great Bazar (Burrabazar) of Calcutta.

From the point of view of later, i.e. comparatively recent, developments, involving Marwari dominance in industry (which was extremely slow to mature and characterised by an almost proverbial caution about long-term investment), the growing importance of the Marwaris in the share market of Calcutta in the late 19th century seems to have been highly significant. "Brokerage was one of their traditional occupations; but their importance as shareholders can be traced to their proverbial love for speculation. This would account for the prevalence of forward contracts in the Calcutta share market and the forced sales during periods of monetary stringency. In the art of options they were masters. With their ears to the ground they always received the news affecting the share market first and were unsurpassed in spreading rumours and confusing the market. In the early nineties, when the Calcutta market was wild with the speculation over gold mining companies, the Europeans became surprised at their skill in getting the best out of the market" (Rungta, *Rise of Business Corporations In India*, quoting parts of a report from *The Englishman* of September 1, 1890). Thacker's *Bengal Directory* for 1875 contains a list of "Native Sharebrokers" in which almost all the names are of Bengalis. It appears that the replacement of the Bengalis by the Marwaris as a dominant force in the share market occurred somewhere between 1875 and 1890.

The picture of the Marwari first dominating the field of banking, then expanding into the cloth and the jute market and then from the share market into industry seems to be broadly correct, though the actual process was more complicated than the picture would suggest. How the first generation migrants established themselves, what kind of competition they faced from the Bengalis or Khattris or whether they just stepped into a gap, seems hard to document. The family histories and prevailing traditions seem to point to a generally common background of austere life as petty brokers, "munims" or confidential clerks, small dealers, etc. The Bengali stereotype of the Marwari as arriving from Rajasthan with only a "brasspot and a blanket" is naturally oversimplified like all stereotypes but does not seem totally invalid in view of the contemporary accounts of Marwari immigrants in western India in the late 19th century. There is one fundamental difference between Marwari migration in western India and the same phenomenon in eastern India. The Marwaris in Bengal were not rural

moneylenders. They settled in the marketing centres starting from Burrabazar at the apex of a pyramid, as it were, to relatively small distributing and collecting centres of rur-urban character, particularly in northern and western Bengal. Yet there is likely to be a considerable degree of similarity in the habits, attitudes, and even methods of two groups of ethnically and regionally identical people migrating to two different regions in the sub-continent.

The *Bombay Gazetteer* ("Sholapur", vol. XX, 1884) thus describes the Marwari immigrants:

"When they come from their native country they bring nothing except a brass drinking pot, tattered clothes, and a big stick. By degrees they come to own good houses with a store of brass and copper vessels and gold, silver and pearl ornaments. . . . When they first come they begin by serving as shop boys in Marwari shops or go hawking parched grain, crying out . . . that parched grain will be exchanged for broken glass and bangles. . . . They begin with a capital of 2 to 4 as., buying parched grain and receiving in exchange, not copper or silver coins but pieces of glass or glass bangles, old iron and other articles, which a needy daughter-in-law or daughter gives away stealthily. This the hawker gathers and sells to bangle-makers and blacksmiths. . . . They also keep eating houses . . . serve as shroffs or money changers, moneylenders and bankers. . . . Social disputes are settled at caste meetings."

The *Gazetteer* continues: "With the savings of a year or two he [the Marwari] opens a small shop, often in partnership with a countryman. In other cases the newly arrived Marwari binds himself in some capacity as servant to a settled Marwari, and works with him till he is fit to open a petty shop on his own account. This he will often do on capital borrowed from his own master, or from other members who give him credit at low interest. If his shop succeeds he gains a share in some cloth-making concern, and at the same time, starts as a moneylender or pawnbroker and rapidly increases his wealth. At this stage in his career he sends for his family and some of his distant relations. A Marwari who has begun to make a fortune rarely returns to settle in his native place. If his family is not with him, marriage and other religious ceremonies sometimes require his presence at home and he may have to go home to seek a bride. . . . During any temporary absence his business is managed by his confidential clerk



or *munim* in default of a partner, or by one of his relations. Their thrifty habits they never lose. . . . Though thrifty and averse from pomp and show, they are expected to spend large sums on marriage and other religious ceremonies, and it is usual for them on such occasions to entertain the whole caste. . . . They have their temples and they are understood to contribute for the support of their own poor."

In Calcutta the last decade of the 19th century was a period of consolidation for the Marwari community. Before this period the only organised body among the Marwaris was the *panchayet*. The organisational gap was sought to be filled by the formation of the Marwari Association in 1898. Earlier, in 1892, the Baled Jute Association of Calcutta had been established. The names of members of this Association show the predominance of the Marwaris. The Marwari Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1900. "The members of this Chamber handled 80% of the import trade in piccegoods in Calcutta. In the very first year of its existence, as many as 1,198 arbitration cases were referred to this Chamber and 1,081 such disputes were settled to the satisfaction of the parties concerned" (*Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, Bharat Chamber of Commerce, quoted in *Calcutta and Its Hinterland*). After the construction of Harrison Road in 1892 land in Burrabazar on both sides of the road was sold in small plots which were purchased by Marwari merchants who constructed multi-storied residential houses with shops on the ground floor and the first floor, setting a general trend for the Burrabazar area (O. C. Ganguly, *Bharater Silpa O Amar Katha*, quoted in N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, vol. III). About this time three periodicals called *Marwari Bapari*, *Burrabazar Gazette* and *Marwari*, mainly dealing with the economic life of the Marwaris in Calcutta, were founded.

It is not possible to trace quantitatively the process of numerical expansion of the Marwari community in Calcutta. It is alleged that even today the Marwaris are considerably undercounted in the census because so many of them sleep in offices and out of the way hostels. The census of 1901 makes the first clear reference to the number of immigrants from Rajputana, adding up to the figure of 15,000 (5,700 from Jaipur, mostly from Shekhavati, 6,500 from Bikaner (including the Churu area) and 1,100 from Jodhpur). The census of 1911 mentions 8,000\* immigrants from Jaipur and 7,000 from Bikaner. For the census year of 1921 it is

observed in the report: "The immigration from Rajputana has shown a phenomenal increase in recent years. This increase marks the invasion of the Marwari community into the business circles of Calcutta." In the years following the First World War the Marwaris were moving into the sectors of industry and mining (lac, mica, etc.).

The phenomenal success of the Marwaris in the business world of Calcutta, and their growing prominence in the city, make the question of the Bengali attitude towards the community significant from the point of view of relationship between different language and regional groups, and especially between local and non-local communities. The success of the Marwaris attracted little attention from Bengali social and economic observers before 1930s. The first serious comment on the phenomenon came from the reputed Bengali scientist, P. C. Roy, who was deeply concerned with the economic rejuvenation of Bengal and was himself the founder of the first significant venture in the field of Indian chemical industry. He expressed admiration for what he considered to be the typical Marwari qualities of industry, thrift and tenacity, conspicuously lacking, according to him, in Bengali character. He was, however, deeply touched by the spectacle of vast unemployment among the educated youth of Bengal and the displacement of the Bengalis from the fields of major economic activities by people not quite identified with Bengal's regional interests. Commenting on a highly successful Marwari industrial family for whom he had some admiration, P. C. Roy writes in a tone of friendly reproof that the family's welfare expenditure is entirely for the native village while it extracts its wealth from Calcutta.

A very different point of view is expressed by Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar, a prominent sociologist of the thirties. In an article entitled "The Economic Expansion of the Bengali People," published in *The Insurance and Finance Review* of February 1934, Sarkar refers to the development of new qualifications, aptitudes and professions, represented by Company promoters and directors, bank managers, insurance agents, manufacturers, exporters and importers, newsagents, engineers and chemists, printers and publishers. He makes specific mention of young men, trained in new engineering institutions of Bengal, and in Germany, U.S.A. and Japan, taking up the manufacture of fans,

electric bulbs, soaps, ink, fountain pens, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, scientific apparatus, etc. Sarkar points to the contribution of non-Bengali manual labour to the growth of the economy of Bengal and emphasises the need for co-operation with Marwari finance.

[The subject of this Postscript was suggested  
by Dr Biplab Dasgupta of Sussex University.]

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(Appendices and Postscripts have not been indexed.)

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